

THE AUSTRALIANS AT THE BOER WAR

R. L. Wallace



THE AUSTRALIANS AT THE BOER WAR

R. L. Wallace

Tom Roberts
Sydney 1901

About three-quarters of a century has passed since the Australians faced Mauser and pom pom fire and suffered the ravages of disease in South Africa. Sadly the story of the Australian contribution in the Boer War is not well known. This is surprising because no less than 16,175 enlisted men embarked to fight in South Africa. It was the first significant force to leave Australia. There were also many who either worked or paid a passage to the front. The South African regiments raised in Natal and Cape Colony all contained them. Many Australian refugees from Paul Kruger's Republic also served in the colonial regiments. An Australian, Walter Karri Davies, was the co-founder of the Imperial Light Horse, which became one of the most famed of the South African regiments. Altogether the number of fighting Australians must have been 20,000 or more. In fact Australians seem to have taken part in almost every major engagement, for some fought with British regular units.

From the manner in which Australians bore themselves in a highly mobile campaign, in a country similar to their own, they earned a reputation second to none as mounted infantry and scouts. After such a lapse of time, any worthwhile account of their record in the campaign over the best part of three years would hardly be possible but for the preservation in the newspapers of the day of soldiers' letters from the front. The exploits and comments told in the words of the men who were there, on veldt and kopje, fitted into the story of a moving campaign, form the basis of this history.



Robert L. Wallace is a retired PMG officer of Crow's Nest, Sydney, whose interest in British history has been life long. He first saw England in 1947 and again in 1953 when he pursued the interests of his earlier visit—watching test cricket in between cycling through historic Britain—a selective, pleasant and absorbing way of combining past and present. Over two summers during the two visits he cycled 11,000 miles.

In a first visit to the Republic of South Africa in 1965 his interest was kindled in the Australian participation in the Boer War. The more he read of it the more his imagination and pride were stirred. He is a man with a thirst for detail and during the course of three subsequent trips (the photograph above was taken at Wagon Hill, Ladysmith, in 1970) he followed up his research by travelling extensively to explore the old battlefields, locating and investigating many of the places where the Australians had fought. *The Australians at the Boer War* is his first published work.

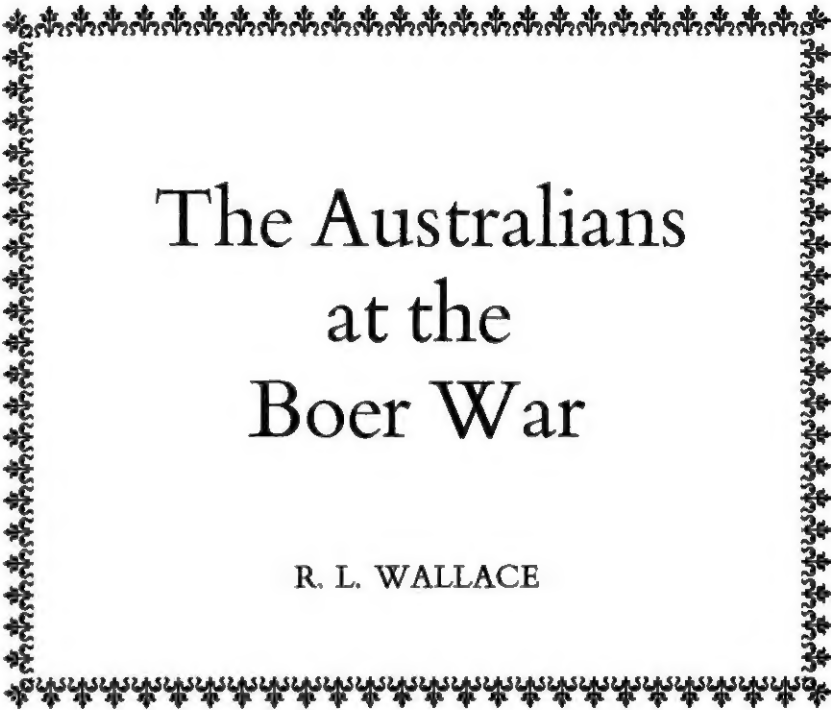
Jacket illustration from the painting
'Sergeant N.S.W. Mounted Rifles' by Tom Roberts (1896)

Jacket designed by Chris Roper
Design Section
Australian Government Publishing Service

ISBN 0 642 99391 2

Printed in Australia

THE AUSTRALIANS AT THE BOER WAR



The Australians at the Boer War

R. L. WALLACE

THE AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL AND THE
AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING SERVICE
CANBERRA 1976

*Published jointly by
The Australian War Memorial and the
Australian Government Publishing Service*

© Commonwealth of Australia 1976

ISBN 0 642 99391 2

THEY COULD NOT KNOW THE
SPLENDOUR OF THEIR DYING

*(From the inscription on the Memorial
Gateway at the Military Cemetery at
Wagon Hill, Ladysmith.)*



Preface

The study of the Boer War and the part Australians played in it became a labour of love for me when I visited the Republic of South Africa in 1965 and saw the graves of Australians who had fallen in the war. This study took me to South Africa on three more visits, two during periods of leave as a linesman in the Postmaster-General's Department and the last in 1972-73 after retiring.

It has been my good fortune to travel extensively over the principal battlefields and to visit many of the military cemeteries between Cape Town and Pietersburg in northern Transvaal, including the small military cemetery in the city of Durban and the military cemetery at Maitland, outside Cape Town, where Australians from the Boer War and from the 1914-18 War rest together. In the Kimberley region historical trails took me walking over the battlefields at Belmont, Graspan, Magersfontein and Paardeberg, and directed me to others in the Colesberg district of the Cape Province, south of the Orange River. There among the ridges and kopjes was Pink Hill, where the Australians fought so valiantly, and the forward camp site on Slingsfontein Farm, rich with the memories of colonial troopers of those far distant days.

In Natal there were the battlefields of Colenso, Mount Alice and Pieter's Hill, and on two occasions I trudged up the steep winding track to the summit of Spion Kop. Nearer to Ladysmith the ridge of Caesar's Camp and Wagon Hill, where the defence of the town was fought so desperately, beckoned my footsteps along the full length of its fateful rocky crests and plateaus. Within sight of the railway station at Elandsplaagte I tramped across the kopjes once so embattled, and in northern Natal looked upon the scene of a British Pyrrhic victory at Talana Hill, an outlying hill from Dundee. In the western Transvaal the trail had me scrambling over the

almost forgotten shrub-choked trenches once so valiantly defended by Australian Bushmen and Rhodesians at Elands River Post and not so many miles away disclosed the place at Koster River where the Bushmen fought all day from the long grass beside the road.

In November 1904 the Prime Minister of Australia, Mr George Reid, told a returned soldiers' annual dinner in Melbourne, that he would do his best 'to see that some memorial of the campaign in the shape of an authentic history from an Australian point of view should be published'. My purpose in writing this book has been to carry out this promise to some degree.

I give my thanks to the many people who gave me so much help with this book and my deepest debt is to the late Ronald Monson, formerly Publications Officer at the Australian War Memorial. Mr Monson commenced reading my manuscript in December 1971 and, before he fell ill, during 1972 gave me valuable advice and much encouragement to undertake further research. He realised the importance of the discovery of the letter written by Lieutenant George Witton to Major J. F. Thomas on the Morant-Handcock case, which had been lodged at the Mitchell Library in 1929 with the stipulation that it should not be released until 1970. This letter throws a new light on this celebrated case and it must be left to the reader to draw his own conclusions after reading the relevant extracts in this book. I wish to thank Mr Wesley Witton of Korumburra, Victoria, for giving permission for me to quote extracts from his uncle's letter. He gave this after some consideration. Although fully aware that publication must renew the controversy, we both believe that publication is justified. I remember reading the letter in the Mitchell Library for the first time. I felt so stunned that as I looked across the room it seemed hard to realise that nothing else round me had changed in those few minutes. Whatever the reasons for Witton to come out with the allegation after so many years, there is no doubt that the effect on Major J. F. Thomas would have been shattering. Thomas had written to Witton saying how he was going to write about 'the truth of the Morant and Handcock story'. He obviously abandoned the idea on getting Witton's letter. I also want to thank Mr Wesley Witton for permission to publish extracts from his uncle's book *Scapegoats of the Empire*.

I have always appreciated the encouragement given me by Mr A. J. Sweeting, the Assistant Director, when during my first visit to the Australian War Memorial we talked about what I was trying to do.

Grateful acknowledgment is made to the Librarian of the Africana Library in Johannesburg for the use of the library and for permission to publish extracts from the Johannesburg *Critic*; to the staff also for many kindnesses, especially to Mrs B. Nagelgast for her helpful suggestions.

Thanks are due to the respective staffs of the Library of New South Wales and the Mitchell Library and for the use of the resources of those

libraries. I thank the Mitchell Library also for providing me with a copy of the Witton letter once the question of copyright had been resolved.

I wish to acknowledge the assistance of the Australian Archives office in Canberra in searching for documents, and for the help of staff at Victoria Barracks, Sydney, in supplying information on the origin of the Rising Sun badge.

I thank Messrs Faber and Faber for permission to quote extracts from *Commando* by Deneys Reitz.

At the Australian War Memorial I must thank Ian Fitchett, Ronald Monson's successor, for his successful search for the owner of the copyright of Lieutenant Witton's letter, for the help he gave me in the final stages of the book and for the research he did on many parts of it. I wish particularly to thank Miss Mary Gilchrist for her final editing and checking of my manuscript, and Peter Burness, Curator of Relics and expert on the Boer War, for his help in seeking accuracy in its content.

I owe much to my wife Gwen for the generous support she gave me and for those happy days together on veldt and kopje.

Finally I wish to thank the Board of Trustees of the Australian War Memorial for their decision to publish my book and the then Director, Mr W. R. Lancaster, for his influence in this decision being reached.

Sydney, 1974

R.L.W.

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	vii
1 A forgotten war	1
2 The long background to the war	7
3 The call to arms	17
4 The retreat to Ladysmith and the siege	43
5 The Australian contingents settle in	59
6 Buller's Natal campaign, December 1899	87
7 Australians in action on the Central Front	101
8 The relief of Kimberley and the battle for Paardeberg	117
9 The relief of Ladysmith	143
10 Australians at Bloemfontein and the advance to Johannesburg	173
11 The fall of Pretoria	201
12 The Boers surrender in the Orange Free State	213
13 The raising of the second Australian contingents	231
14 The Bushmen enter the western Transvaal	243
15 The siege of Elands River post	257
16 In pursuit of General de Wet	275
17 A new pattern of war	285
18 Kitchener's scorched earth policy	299
19 The second winter of the war	321
20 The action at Gun Hill and the blockhouse system	335
21 Australians as scouts and the great blockhouse drives	347
22 The court-martial and execution of Lieutenants Morant and Handcock	361
23 Peace	385
24 Bibliography	395
25 Glossary	399
26 Index	401

Illustrations and maps

	<i>Facing page</i>
A camp of the NSW Army Medical Corps	16
Men of the First Victorian Infantry Company soon after their arrival in South Africa	17
Lieutenant G. J. Grieve	17
Lieutenant C. F. Cox, New South Wales Lancers	32
Lieutenant W. V. Dowling, First Australian Horse	32
Loading horses at Sydney on the transport <i>Southern Cross</i>	33
'A' Squadron, New South Wales Mounted Rifles, arriving Cape Town, December 1899	33
Sergeant H. McIntosh, New South Wales Mounted Rifles	48
Boer snipers on Spion Kop	48
A Boer hospital train arriving at Pretoria	49
A group of Boer guerillas	64
Newly-recruited Bushmen at Kensington Racecourse, Sydney, 1900	65
A troop of New South Wales Citizens' Bushmen on parade	96
New South Wales Citizens' Bushmen marching through Sydney before embarkation, February 1900	97
Deserted Boer positions, west of Mafeking, after the relief	112
British infantry at Driefontein, March 1900	112
A Boer convoy of the Heilbron commando	113
British prisoners of war, released from Waterval, June 1900	113
Lieutenant N. R. Howse, VC, New South Wales Army Medical Corps	144
Trooper T. C. Morris, New South Wales Lancers	144
A camp of the New South Wales Imperial Bushmen, 1900	145
Australian Bushmen preparing to leave Mafeking for service in the Transvaal, August 1900	145
Lieutenant R. E. Zouch, New South Wales Citizens' Bushmen	160

Trooper John Waddell, afterwards killed at Elands River	160
A stone recording the names of four men killed at Elands River	161
Graves of men killed at Elands River	161
Lieutenant R. J. L. White, New South Wales Imperial Bushmen	192
New South Wales Imperial Bushmen preparing fodder for their horses	192
Victorian Bushmen parading through Melbourne before embarkation	193
A New South Wales Bushman with local natives	193
New South Wales Imperial Bushmen crossing a river during their advance in the Transvaal, 1900	208
Six Boer Commandants	208
New South Wales Imperial Bushmen in action near Ottoshoop in the Transvaal, September 1900	209
Bushmen advancing during operations in the Transvaal, 1900	209
A parade of returned members of the first New South Wales Contingent at Victoria Barracks, Sydney, 1901	224
Trooper J. H. Bisbee, VC, welcomed home from South Africa	225
Soldiers from the Gundagai district welcomed home from South Africa	225
A group of youthful well-armed Boers	240
An Australian regiment advancing; South Africa 1901	241
Australian troops keeping watch on a Boer outpost	241
Australians camped in makeshift tents on the veldt	256
The burial of three Australians, ambushed on 8 April 1901	257
Officers of the Fifth Victorian Mounted Rifles with their British commanding officer	272
Lieutenant G. B. Forster, Second New South Wales Mounted Rifles	273
Australians playing 'two-up' in South Africa	273
A troop of the 2nd Battalion, Scottish Horse	304
Australian troops with a Boer prisoner	305
Men of the New South Wales Mounted Rifles crossing the Orange River, 1901	320
Australian troops watering horses at Doornkop Spruit in the Transvaal	320
Captains A. E. Forrest and S. R. Antill, Australian Commonwealth Horse	321
Seaforth Highlanders on the march	321
Men of the First Australian Commonwealth Horse destroying a Boer crop	352
A British blockhouse	352
Lieutenants H. B. Morant and G. R. Witton	353
Photocopy of Lieutenant Handcock's farewell letter to his sister	368
Lieutenant C. B. B. White, a Staff Officer with the First Australian Commonwealth Horse	369

Veterans of the South African War, who were serving with the 2/23rd Training Battalion in Australia in 1940	369
---	-----

MAPS

Orange Free State	30
Southern Africa, showing railways, principal rivers and towns	129
Eastern Transvaal	229
Western Transvaal and the Orange Free State	262



CHAPTER 1

A forgotten war

At the turn of the century many young men in the Australian colonies responded to the call from the Colonial Governments to enlist for the war in South Africa. Men from the cities and bushmen from the far outback thronged the recruiting centres, competing for places in the contingents about to go overseas. Anxious to fight in the Mother Country's cause and eager with the spirit of adventure, they pressed upon a reluctant Great Britain their services in the quarrel with Paul Kruger's Transvaal Boers. From the barracks in the capital cities they marched eagerly and optimistically to the waiting troopships.

In a short space of time with their vigour and courage these largely untrained troops from a land without a military history won on the rocky kopjes and open veldt in South Africa the regard of the Imperial military men. In doing so they cast for the first time the name of Australia on the roll of military annals—a name to be borne not many years later with added lustre upon the craggy ridges of Gallipoli and the muddled fields of France.

In their native land the men who were there, in common with the war and the events that led up to it, seem almost forgotten with the receding years. Of the young Australians who fought against the Boers of the

Republics—the Orange Free State and the Transvaal—most have fallen out with the passing of time. Those who never returned rest in military cemeteries in what is today the Republic of South Africa. Now is the time to recall the stirring events which took place in South Africa at the turn of the century.

In the days when the population of Australia was little more than 3,500,000, a total of 16,175 volunteers were accepted to fight overseas. The services of as many again were turned down. Unsuccessful applicants in considerable numbers managed to find their own way to South Africa to join the ranks of the colonial forces being raised there. All the volunteer regiments from the British territories—Cape Colony and Natal—had large numbers of Australians in the ranks. This was due also to the influx of Australians who in pre-war days lived and worked in South Africa.

The decade before 1900 marked a period of depression in the Australian colonies. Unemployment reached a very high level. In South Africa the discovery of a payable gold bearing reef on the Witwatersrand brought a booming growth to the mining and allied industries, with business opportunities and employment that did not exist in Australia. Many Australians, professional men, tradesmen and others less skilled, left the country and sailed west. Nearly all these men settled in the Witwatersrand region of the Transvaal, where the mines and the 'Golden City' of Johannesburg were located. Hence when the war began thousands of young Australians in the Transvaal became refugees and enlisted in the forces then being raised in the British South African colonies.

The men who fought in South Africa were not the very first Australians to fight overseas. Some volunteers took part in the Maori Wars in 1863. In 1885, with the news of the fall of Khartoum and the death there of General Gordon, the British Government accepted an offer from New South Wales to send troops to the Sudan. A contingent of 760 volunteers, consisting of artillerymen, infantry and an ambulance corps, sailed from Sydney on 3 March 1885. The contingent disembarked at the Red Sea port of Suakin and joined the Nile Field Force under Lord Wolseley.

The New South Welshmen came under fire by taking part in an attack on the Arab village of Tamai. After giving some slight resistance the Arabs were forced to withdraw, leaving the Tamai wells to the British. Lieutenant William Cope, who was to serve with the New South Wales Bushmen in South Africa wrote: 'On approaching the wells the enemy opened fire, which for a time was pretty sharply kept up from the hills around, but no determined resistance was made. The New South Wales infantry was posted on the heights commanding the hills and, in advancing to the posts allotted to them, three men were hit, while the bullets whizzed harmlessly by many of us.'

Before long the British decided to evacuate the Sudan and the Nile Field Force was withdrawn. The New South Wales Contingent returned to Sydney after an absence of only three months, disappointed at having seen so little action. Apart from the three wounded infantrymen, six men died from enteric fever or dysentery.

There were some Australians within this period who served in the British Regular Army, men like Lieut-Colonel Robert Coveny, who became the only Australian to command the Black Watch Regiment. Coveny was born in Sydney in 1841. After joining the army he served five years in India. He was killed in the advance to the relief of Khartoum on 10 February 1885, when British infantry stormed an Arab position on the bank of the Nile River.

The federation of the Australian colonies took place in 1901 fourteen months after the outbreak of the Boer War; the Government of the Commonwealth of Australia took over all recruiting responsibilities from the individual States, as the former colonies then became called. The first fighting forces to leave Australia representing the Commonwealth Government sailed for South Africa in February 1902. Within the next few months 4,000 troops went overseas. But these were the closing months of the war, consequently the men saw little action. Indeed, the latest arrivals found that peace had been declared while they were on the high seas. Eight battalions of the Australian Commonwealth Horse, as the new contingents were called, were raised in addition to a Commonwealth Army Medical Corps.

The Australian Commonwealth Horse went overseas wearing the first military badge to bear the rising sun device. This badge was designed and made in a hurry after Major-General Edward Hutton, dissatisfied with the designs at first submitted, wanted something with a more martial quality. So the first battalions of the Commonwealth Horse were issued with a badge that was a seven pointed design based on an arrangement of swords and bayonets, radiating from a brass crown. It originated from a trophy mounted on a semi-circular board over the doorway in General Hutton's office at Victoria Barracks, Melbourne. From this came, in 1904, a modified design that became known as the Rising Sun and has been worn with distinction by Australian soldiers ever since.

A high percentage of the men enrolled in the first contingents to leave for South Africa were members of either the permanent army or the militia. They already had the benefit of considerable training and discipline. The raw recruits, selected because of their horsemanship and accuracy on the rifle range, went through a rapid course of soldiering in schools of instruction for about a month. In the beginning the British authorities preferred infantry, so the first contingents included a number of infantry companies. These however never went into action as infantry. Almost immediately after

arriving at the front they were converted to mounted infantry. All the Australian contingents fought as mounted troopers in South Africa.

Many Australians who served in the Boer War also served in 1914-18. Among these were the founders of the Australian Imperial Force that landed at Gallipoli, Major-General William Throsby Bridges and Lieut-Colonel Cyril Brudenell White.¹

It is interesting to recall that in October 1914 when the transports carrying the first convoy of Anzacs were being assembled in Albany Harbour in Western Australia and destined to disembark in Egypt, news was received that a section of the Boers had broken out in revolt against their own Government. Arrangements were quickly being made to send the convoy to reinforce the forces loyal to the South African Prime Minister, General Louis Botha, but within two days news came that the Government had the situation well in hand. Even so, Australians who succumbed on the way home from wounds received in France rest side by side in South Africa with the Australian fallen of the Boer War in a small military cemetery in Durban and in the military cemetery at Maitland near Cape Town.

The events of the Boer War, the largest overseas campaign the British Army had undertaken up till then, have long since been thrown into the background by the more recent and more devastating wars. The War of 1914-18, in particular, coming only twelve years after the Peace of 1902, with its unprecedented battle casualties, caused the events of earlier nineteenth century conflicts to fade by comparison.

The Boer War began on 11 October 1899 and continued until the signing of the Peace at Pretoria on 31 May 1902. Considering that more than 16,000 Australians were engaged their casualties were not heavy. This was because as mounted troops they were seldom called upon to make frontal attacks on strongly-held positions as the British infantry commonly did in the early months of the war. The other main factor was the ability to adapt themselves quickly to the environment and the style of fighting in which they found themselves involved. The casualties of the Australians numbered 1,400 wounded, 251 either killed or died of wounds, and 267 died of disease. The majority of the casualties were caused by rifle fire, with only a low percentage due to shelling.

The high proportion of deaths from disease was caused by the drinking of impure water and the neglect of sanitation. The only safe way was to boil the water but in a country where timber was scarce this often became difficult when on the march. Each man usually replenished his water-bottle from a stagnant pool, a stream or a farm dam, already polluted with the bodies of animals. In some staging camps and along the march neglect of

proper sanitation safeguards often resulted in the production of disease organisms that were spread by flies or on wind-borne dust.

Field Marshal Lord Roberts reported in a despatch to the War Office on 16 February 1900: 'One of the most pressing needs in South African warfare is the supply of a sufficient quantity of drinking water to the troops when marching, especially in the daytime; the climate being an extremely dry one and the sun's heat very trying.'

A. G. Hales, the Australian war correspondent, was bitter when he wrote of a number of men who died of disease:

'I will tell you why they died, and tell you in language so plain that a wayfaring man, even though a fool, cannot misunderstand me, for the time has arrived when the whole Empire should know the truth in all its native hideousness. Those men were done to death by wanton carelessness upon the part of men sent out by the British War Office. They were done to death through criminal neglect of the most simple laws of sanitation. Men were huddled together in camp after camp; they were allowed to turn the surrounding veldt and adjacent kopjes into cesspools and excreta camps. In some camps no latrines were dug, no supervision was exercised. The so-called Medical Staff looked on, and puffed their cigarettes and talked under their eye-glasses—the fools, the idle, empty-headed noodles. And whilst they smoked and talked twaddle, the grim, gaunt Shadow of Death chuckled in the watches of the night, thinking of the harvest that was to follow.

'Then the careless soldiers passed onward, leaving their camp vacant, and later came another batch of soldiers. Perhaps the men in charge would be men of higher mental calibre; they would order latrines to be dug, and all garbage to be burnt or buried. But by this time the germs of fever were in the air, the men would sicken and die, just as I have seen them sicken and die upon a score of mining fields away in the Australian bush; and all for the want of a little honest care and attention, all for the want of a few grains of good, wholesome, everyday common sense. Had proper care been taken in regard to these matters, four-fifths of those who now fill fever graves in South Africa would be with us, hale and hearty men, to-day.'²

Of the tens of thousands of soldiers who passed through the hospitals, only 5 per cent of the cases were caused by wounds. Major A. Watson, Australian Army Medical Corps, said: 'In the South African war, from lack of hygienic measures, we failed in preventing those scourges of armies, enteric and dysentery, which to a large extent might have been prevented had there been an efficient sanitary and nursing staff at the commencement of the war.'³ Yet these things occurred in one of the healthiest countries of the world.

¹ C. E. W. Bean, *Two Men I Knew* (1957).

² A. G. Hales, *Campaign Pictures of the War in South Africa* (1900).

³ Quoted from his paper read to the Australian Medical Conference in 1908.

Major R. Spencer Browne, who was attached to the First Queensland Contingent for Special Service, stated on his return to Brisbane on 24 November 1900: 'Sanitary precautions were absent from the very beginning of the war. The land reeks with the dead bodies of men, horses and cattle, barely covered with a foot of Mother Earth, causing pollution of rivers and streams.'

Very often the fallen soldier was buried in a lonely spot near where he fell with his resting place marked by nothing more than a frail cross formed from a packing case and erected by his mates. Over the years the effects of the wind and rain, the heat of summer and veldt fires or even the action of an African looking for firewood, caused the disappearance of these modest memorials and the loss of the dead man's identity. Sometimes his name would be recorded on a piece of paper left in a tin that once held 'bully beef' or army biscuits. Six months after an action at Wilmansrust the graves of the Victorians were marked by 'pieces of biscuit boxes that serve as tombstones, and the names of the deceased in lead pencil being partly obliterated'.

In recent years the War Graves Commission has been active in finding and bringing to some central place the remains of many a soldier who rested far out on the open veldt or in the lee of some remote kopje. On granite memorials throughout South Africa the names of the fallen shine from newly engraved letters of gold. There are some who bear no name other than 'An Unknown British Soldier.'

CHAPTER 2

The long background to the war

Proper appreciation of the long-standing quarrel between Briton and Boer, or of the war of 1899-1902, cannot be gained unless one goes back to the early history of South Africa and the story of the origin and formation of the Boer people and their first contact with the British.

The first European settlers in South Africa were Dutch who came to the Cape of Good Hope in 1652 following the decision of the Dutch East India Company to make a base for the victualling of its ships. The voyage from Holland to the Indies took about six months; hence a half-way house with fresh provisions, meat, fruit and vegetables became very much worthwhile.

At first everyone in the settlement was a paid employee of the Company but before long certain released employees were given land. These free farmers became known as burghers. The Company had no intention of extending the Colony and new settlers were not encouraged but people of Dutch, French and German stock were accepted. The Huguenots, religious refugees from France, were allowed free passage.

Nonetheless the official policy continued to be that the settlement existed solely for the Company's rich shipping trade. Soon the Company forbade the arrival of new settlers altogether, making the settlement even more

isolated. Even so the boundaries became wider when many burghers left the Cape, going east by valleys providing good pastures. They became semi-nomadic pastoralists.

The natives were neither numerous nor possessed with a strong fighting spirit. The more primitive bushmen tribes were easily overcome and the Hottentots whose cattle grazed along the coastal lands lost their pastures when they clashed with the white farmers. The farmers, or Boers as they became known, continually pushed the frontier back, until halted at the Fish River on the lower east coast.

In this region late in the eighteenth century the Boers met the Bantu, an impact still reverberating. The Bantu were also newcomers. At the time of the arrival of the Europeans at the Cape they were migrating south from Central Africa and this movement, taking them down the fertile east coast, was stopped by the meeting with the Europeans. The Bantu, a strong and vigorous fighting race, gave the Boers endless trouble as both were cattle farmers requiring grazing land.

Before long pressures built up and brought armed clashes. The Dutch Governor hoped to maintain peace by making the Fish River the official boundary between the races. However, this declaration failed to solve the issue and the first of many frontier wars began.

The authority of the Dutch East India Company weakened as the boundaries of the territory lengthened. On the frontier Company rule rested lightly upon the Boer hunters and herdsman who, although they found its law irksome, complained of not receiving enough support from it. When the Governor sent a magistrate to restore peace on the frontier he seemed to favour the Bantu. Growing discontent led the frontier settlers to announce the formation of two small Republics, to be independent of Company rule. Both however were stillborn as events in Europe began to have a direct bearing on affairs at the Cape.

In Europe the Napoleonic wars were being fought with Holland allied to France. To prevent the sea route to India falling into French control Britain occupied the Cape for eight years, governing the whole territory. This ended the rule of the Dutch East India Company in South Africa, for when hostilities ceased in Europe the British handed over the territory to the officials of the Dutch Government.

Some years later, when the war in Europe flared up once more, the British again took action to hold the Cape by sending a fleet and troops. When peace came in 1814 Britain retained the Cape because of its strategical importance along the sea route to India. In return the Dutch Government received £6,000,000.

The people in the territory now coming under British rule were no longer Dutch, German or French but a distinct race of Afrikaner people

with strong sentiments of their own. With the passing of 162 years they had become masters of the land they occupied, checked only by the tough opposition from the Bantu along the south-east coastal strip. Accustomed to the solitude and freedom of the open veldt, the frontier Boers became a product of their environment.

In the remote community hunting and stock raising were the way of life. The houses were of earth or stone. Sometimes they grew wheat to supplement the flocks. Others lived an entirely nomadic life in covered wagons depending only on the increase of the flocks. Closer to Cape Town, where the homes were often stately, the solely agricultural farmers grew wheat and cultivated vineyards. It was a territory of scattered villages, with one big town. In Cape Town the citizens were either garrison, merchants or tradesmen.

At the time of the transfer to Britain the white population of the territory numbered about 26,000. There were also 30,000 slaves, whose presence made life fairly easy for the farmers. From the earliest years when the burghers were granted land for farms the Company adopted a policy of importing slave labour from Madagascar and the East Indies.

The British now possessed a territory bounded on three sides by oceans. The important thing was that the northern boundary, known as the Hinterland, was undefined. The white population of farmers and frontiersmen, substantially Dutch in origin with strong influxes of German and French, now found themselves under foreign rule. One of the first actions of the British resulted in the establishing of about 5,000 English settlers on farmland near the Fish River with the aim of strengthening the area by means of a population barrier. This was the first white group not to be assimilated by the Boers.

At a time when liberal social ideas were being advanced in Europe representatives of the London Missionary Society went to the Cape. They soon began to work for better conditions for the native people. Their ideas were very different from those of the Boers who had lived for so long in isolation and knew nothing of the new concepts from Europe. Consequently the Boers were soon at variance with the missionaries and the Government over the introduction of a new measure making black farm labourers who were not slaves equal with Europeans before the law. The Boers had long been accustomed to taking the law in respect of coloured persons into their own hands, and so did not like the new law.

The conflict of opinion between the London missionaries and the burghers continued over the years. On 15 March 1847 David Livingstone (the famous missionary) wrote from beyond the river Vaal: 'These Dutchmen hate missionaries cordially. They believe we will tell the Government all about their nefarious deeds. They are our greatest obstacles.' On 20 April 1849

Livingstone also wrote: 'The Boers are determined to have me out of the country.'¹

The Cape Boers were also indignant to learn that a European could now be brought to court to face charges made by black labourers. In 1834, when slavery was abolished throughout the British Empire, the Government compensated the owners in the Cape for the freeing of 39,000 slaves although the amount paid fell short of their full market value. The new laws introduced by the Government challenged the social traditions of the Boers. As a result thousands moved far into the interior to escape the control of British law.

Anna Steenkamp, a niece of Piet Retief, one of the Trek leaders, set out the reasons for their discontent: 'The shameful and unjust proceedings with reference to the freedom of our slaves, and yet it was not so much this freedom that drove us to such lengths, as that they were being placed on a footing of equality with Christians, contrary to the laws of God, and the distinction of race and religion.' Retief declared that it was their 'intention to preserve proper relations between master and servant'.

David Livingstone wrote in 1857: 'The great objection many of the Boers had, and still have, to English law is that it makes no distinction between black and white. They feel aggrieved by their supposed losses in the emancipation of their Hottentot slaves, and determined to erect themselves into a Republic, in which they might pursue without molestation the "proper treatment" of the blacks.'²

The foremost cause of the Great Trek was the dissatisfaction with the British administration arising from the feeling of insecurity engendered by the disruption of their traditional way of life. There were other reasons why the dissatisfied Boers trekked, notably the law making English the only official language in the courts when few of the colonists could speak it.

Shortage of land was also a factor. After the frontier Boers reached the Fish River, further expansion along this fertile region was not practical. Some of the trekkers were influenced by reports from scouts of good land beyond the Orange River. They began moving away into the wilderness of the interior in 1836. Within a few years about 10,000 people left the farms and the land of their birth.

The occupation of the Orange Free State and of the Transvaal commenced with the Great Trek. It resulted in the distribution of people of European stock on the grassy plains of South Africa. The trekkers moved off in covered wagons with their families, their flocks and all their possessions in independent parties, each under its own leader. The Government did not try to prevent them leaving. There was little that could be done.

¹ *Family Letters 1841-1856*, Vols 1 and 2 (1959), edited by I. Schapera.

² David Livingstone, *Missionary Travels in South Africa* (1857).

Piet Retief led a band of trekkers across the Drakensberg range from west to east descending upon the fertile region of Natal. In this way he outflanked the frontier at the Fish River and overcame resistance from the Bantu warriors of the powerful Zulu nation. The trekkers proclaimed the Independent Republic of Natal. However, they soon clashed with British traders and settlers who had preceded them at the small trading station of Port Natal, where Durban is today. The trekkers wanted the port to give them an outlet for overseas trade. They kept the British settlement in a state of siege for a month until the arrival of troops by sea.

The British then annexed Natal and made it their own territory. Not more than two years had passed since the trekkers declared their Republic but they realised that resistance would be futile. Rather than live again under British rule, they trekked back across the Drakensberg Mountains.

Trekkers were already on the land between the Orange and the Vaal Rivers. They no longer regarded themselves as British citizens but the Cape officials did not recognise their independence. When British sovereignty was claimed for the whole area south of the Vaal, many crossed the river boundary and joined the trekkers already settled in the north. The Government continued to maintain that all the trekkers were British subjects by law.

In 1852 the Government decided to acknowledge the independence of the Boers north of the Vaal. These were the trekkers who had travelled farthest away; those most opposed to British law. The Sand River Convention recognised their independence but they had to undertake not to allow the practice of slavery in the Transvaal. In 1854 British sovereignty over the Boers between the Orange and the Vaal Rivers was abandoned; the new state was known as the Orange Free State. Certain burghers and British traders sent a deputation to London to protest against the evacuation of British authority but the Government had wearied of an occupation marked by native wars and unrest.

South Africa was now politically divided. For some years the idea of a single Transvaal Republic was held only in concept. The undeveloped country soon split up into four small Republics, continually at variance with one another. In 1857 the Transvaalers entered the Free State to attempt annexation. When the opposing forces met the differences were resolved without bloodshed, after Paul Kruger advanced with the Transvaalers' flag of truce.

The first constitution of the South African Republic in the Transvaal was drawn up in 1858, M. W. Pretorius holding the position of President until 1872. He was succeeded by the Reverend T. F. Burgers. The new State experienced difficulty in maintaining stability in its internal affairs but there was no confusion over relationship with the coloured inhabitants. In affirmation of a belief that induced them to leave their homes and brethren at

the Cape, the Constitution stated: 'The people desire to permit no equality between coloured people and white inhabitants, either in church or state.'

President Burgers had been trained in the ministry of the Dutch Reformed Church, his family being one of the oldest in the Cape Colony. An eloquent speaker, Burgers had studied at a university in Europe. In introducing new policies for the advancement of the country he soon found that the burghers were not very willing to accept authority. Nor were they enthusiastic about his policies. He advocated the construction of a rail link with the sea through Portuguese territory to Delagoa Bay. He also tried to introduce a sound system of education and by public works built many new schools in town and country. He established a library and a museum, provided for the training of teachers and government officials and tried to strengthen public administration by appointing men from Holland to official posts.

Before long the liberal ideas of the President in education and religion created difficulties for him. He became especially unpopular with a strong group of burghers led by Kruger. Many burghers suspected that the education system would tend to make the children irreligious. As a result hundreds of burghers left the country in 1874, trekking westward with their families across the Kalihara Desert to Angola. When the President called on commandos to take the field against tribesmen, some burghers refused. In declining to lead such a force Paul Kruger said: 'I cannot lead the commando if you come, for with your merry evenings in laager, and your Sunday dances, God's blessing will not rest on our expedition.'

The burghers resisted the collection of taxes by the Government in Pretoria. They wanted to be independent generally of law and government, and left to live unfettered lives far out on the veldt. With trade stagnant and revenues small the empty treasury could not meet bank loans. The idea of the construction of a railway to Delagoa Bay was abandoned and barter became the most common means of exchange.

The powerful Zulu nation was a latent threat on the south-eastern frontier while President Burgers led a commando against tribesmen much less renowned as warriors. Lacking confidence in their leader the burghers fought half-heartedly and the expedition failed. The British Magistrate at Newcastle in northern Natal sent a report to the Lieutenant-Governor, dated 21 August 1876:

'The latest news from the seat of war in the Transvaal is that brought down by the last post cart. It appears that the Boer commando about 1,400 strong attempted to carry Sikukuni's town and stronghold by assault. The onset was a vigorous one. Very little resistance was at first shown by the natives. They apparently allowed the Boers to get inside the outer wall of the town, when they opened fire on the assailants. The latter at once retreated in a most disorderly manner. The President who was present could

not prevent the retreat, immediately after which about 1,000 burghers left the commando for their homes, in open defiance of the President, who was then left with only about 400 men.'³

The British Government, anxious for stability in the area, was wary of the consequences of a complete collapse of government in the South African Republic. A few years earlier when President Burgers made an unsuccessful visit to Europe to try and raise funds for the development of the railway to Delagoa Bay he had also sought to form alliances with Germany and other European countries. The British view was that there was a probability of direct influence of an overseas power in the affairs of the South African Republic. The British considered that Germany, an expanding power, could seek to promote well known ambitions in southern Africa and gain a foothold in the Transvaal by means of aid offered to that country in straightening out its affairs.

Any such move was certainly regarded by Britain as being inconsistent with her position in South Africa and Sir Theophilus Shepstone was sent as a Special Commissioner to discuss the problems of the South African Republic with President Burgers. Accompanied by a few officials and 25 mounted police, Shepstone arrived in Pretoria on 22 January 1877. During several weeks in the capital he was welcomed by the citizens and entertained by the President. The discussions between Shepstone and Burgers resulted in the issue of a Proclamation on 12 April announcing the Annexation by Great Britain of the South African Republic in the Transvaal. Without a finger being lifted against them a group of British officials went to the Market Square where the Annexation was read before sympathetic onlookers.

On 24 May, the birthday of Queen Victoria, a more formal ceremony took place in Pretoria. Regimental bands played 'God Save the Queen', as the flag was raised on a pole in the market square. Mr H. Rider Haggard, the future novelist and a member of Shepstone's staff, assisted in the flag raising. By midday, with a salute fired from the artillery and cheers from the crowd, the ceremony ended, leaving the unfurled Union Jack unchallenged over the Transvaal capital.

In the elected Assembly, known as the Volksraad, President Burgers admonished the members, blaming them for their past attitudes which he declared had lost them the country. After making a nominal protest against the annexation, he retired to the Cape on a British pension.

Thus within a period of 20 years, British policy towards the Transvaal was reversed. Within that time the ambitions of Germany in southern Africa had become apparent. The British believed that a merging of interests

³ *Correspondence Respecting the War Between the Transvaal Republic and Neighbouring Tribes and Generally with Reference to Native Affairs in South Africa.* (Mitchell Library number Q968.2.)

between the South African Republic and Germany would constitute a threat to their paramount position in South Africa. Nor did the projected construction of a railway to Delagoa Bay please the British as it would make the Republic less dependent on trade through British ports. The events leading up to the annexation and the ease with which it took place showed that the people in the Transvaal in their loosely organised society were not ready to accept the discipline of government but the annexation stirred their nationalism.

Over the next three years British officials straightened out the administrative weaknesses of the country. They saw that taxes were paid regularly and that internal services were conducted efficiently. They maintained a proper control of the finances. Within this period the British fought two native wars. The Bapedi were defeated. The military power of the Zulu nation under Cetewayo was broken in a campaign in which a force of more than 800 soldiers was wiped out almost to a man at Isandhlwana. On the afternoon and night of the same day, 22 January 1879, a heroic stand took place at Rorke's Drift, where no fewer than 11 Victoria Crosses were won.

For three years the Transvaal territory was governed as a Crown Colony. The administrative problems of the country were being overcome but discontent grew when a form of self-government which the burghers waited for did not come quickly enough. Aroused by Paul Kruger who had opposed President Burgers, the burghers began to talk of independence. In Pretoria the British High Commissioner, Sir Garnet Wolseley, was met by crowds carrying banners and petitions in favour of independence. Wolseley then made a famous speech in the course of which he said: 'The sun would cease to shine, and the Vaal would flow backwards through the Drakensberg Mountains, before the British flag would be hauled down in the land.'

At a meeting held at Paardekraal near Krugersdorp, the discontented burghers decided to resist. On 16 December 1880 they rose in arms to recover the independence once so easily lost. They besieged the British garrisons in the small towns and defeated a small force at Bronkhorst Spruit, taking it by surprise on the march. The war ended after the Battle of Majuba Hill in Natal. The Boers held the mountain pass at Laing's Nek, effectively sealing the line of the British advance into the Transvaal.

When his first attempts to breach the pass failed, Major-General Sir George Colley took a mixed force of 365 men and scaled by night the heights of Majuba to overlook the main Boer laager. The next morning Boer sharpshooters worked their way up to the summit from the far side and picked off the soldiers like deer, conspicuous in the clear mountain light with the white helmeted infantry in distinctive red jackets as well as sailors and kilted Highlanders. The British force was decisively defeated.

An Armistice was called. Negotiations, initiated by the British Government before the action at Majuba took place, proceeded in a farmhouse called

O'Neill's Cottage in the lee of Majuba. Peace was restored with the signing of the Convention of Pretoria on 3 August 1881. Meanwhile, the main British force was still camped within sight of Majuba. About the same time Sir Frederick Roberts landed at Cape Town to take command of the reinforced British Army. Two days later he returned to England.

Under the terms of the Convention of Pretoria, the Transvaal territory, called the Transvaal State in the provisions of the Convention, gained its independence subject to certain limitations which were accepted rather than wage a full-scale war against a reinforced army led by Roberts. The British Resident retained the right to veto any legislation directly affecting the natives. The boundaries of the Transvaal could not be altered without British consent. In external affairs the Transvaal was bound to negotiate with any outside power only through the British Government.

The British decision to make peace following the defeats on the Natal-Transvaal border by the granting of a form of independence for the Transvaal was a blow to British prestige in South Africa. The burghers celebrated their victories with a national gathering at the Paardekraal and gave thanks to God for the success of their fine feat of arms at Majuba. Britishers who had settled in the country with faith in the repeated statements that the flag was there to stay felt let down. In Pretoria a coffin containing the Union Jack was carried in a procession on a horse-drawn vehicle from the market square to a site close to Government House, where the representatives were signing the Convention. The coffin was taken from the hearse, lowered in the ground and the grave marked with a suitable inscription.

Under the leadership of President Kruger the new Volksraad soon began to press for complete independence. A delegation led by Kruger visited London, seeking a revision of the Treaty. By the terms of the London Convention dated 27 February 1884, which began by referring to the Transvaal State and then to the South African Republic, no restrictions were placed on the internal affairs of the South African Republic but the control over the foreign relations of the Republic, designed to ensure that Britain remained the paramount power in South Africa, was retained.

President Kruger was a product of the Great Trek. As a small boy he crossed the Orange River and trekked beyond the Vaal in a covered wagon with his parents. He experienced all the hardships of the wilderness. At the age of 14 he shot his first lion. He had grown to manhood with a firm hatred of the British. In the Dutch Reformed Church opposite the Presidency he often preached and read from the Bible, the only book he cared to read. He was convinced that God had appointed him to lead his people.

The South African Republic remained poor. Alluvial gold and patches of rich ore had been worked in the eastern Transvaal soon after 1880, but after a brief boom only a few small mines were left producing gold. So the

country continued to be almost solely pastoral, with some agriculture. Railways were non-existent and the roads bad. Commerce was small and static. Realising that a rich mineral strike could raise the State from its difficulties the Government, which had not previously favoured prospecting, began to encourage exploration for minerals. When he visited Britain in 1883 Kruger told the London Press of his willingness to allow the search for minerals to take place in the Transvaal. From that time foreign capital and enterprise was encouraged.

In 1886 an Australian named George Harrison, an experienced digger from the Australian goldfields, was employed to build a farmhouse on a farm called Langlaagte in the Witwatersrand. Here he stumbled on the main reef, one that was capable of producing payable gold in large quantities. Soon afterwards Harrison sold his claim for £10. After that he was never seen or heard of again.⁴

Opposite page

A camp of the New South Wales Army Medical Corps in the grounds of Government House, Sydney, in 1898. A detachment from the corps was among the first troops despatched to South Africa from New South Wales.

(New South Wales Government Printer)

⁴ A. P. Cartwright, *The Gold Miners* (1960).



CHAPTER 3

The call to arms

On 6 September 1886 the farms of the Witwatersrand were declared public diggings. From the diggings sprang the city of Johannesburg, known as the 'City of Gold'. Neither the Government nor the burghers took a practical part in the working of the mines—they lacked the capital and the necessary skills. Most of the gold waiting to be won was at a great depth with its mining requiring much heavy equipment and large sums of capital, but a long life for the mines seemed assured. The reefs on the Rand because of the regularity of their gold-bearing veins proved to be the richest in the world.

The political effects of the strike were overwhelming; the discovery brought an immediate influx of tens of thousands of British and other foreigners, completely upsetting the balance of population. A staple and rich gold mining industry meant that the foreigners, or Uitlanders as the burghers called them, had come to stay. Without the benefit of any official figures it was generally acknowledged that the Uitlanders formed the largest proportion of the adult male population in the South African Republic. In 1896 the population of the area within a three mile radius of Johannesburg totalled 50,907 and of this number only 6,205 were Boers.

The success of the mining industry solved the economic problems of the Republic, as the revenues taken were considerable. Nine-tenths of the taxes gathered by the Government came from the pockets of the Uitlanders. The farmers also benefited from the presence of an industrial population that provided a ready market for their produce. Once the poorest, the Republic became the richest State in South Africa. Nevertheless, the Uitlanders who extracted the wealth from the ground and developed industry had no voice in either national or municipal matters.

Although when the Conventions were drawn up the foreign minority was guaranteed equal civil rights generally, the terms contained nothing definite regarding political rights. In 1882 the Transvaal introduced a law restricting the franchise to a minimum of five years residence. When the great inflow of Uitlanders to the Witwatersrand field took place, Kruger took a harder stand against the foreign majority in his country. To ensure that, even though outnumbered, the Boers would keep control of the State, he raised the residential qualification progressively to 14 years.

The Uitlanders were generally better educated and more progressive than the burghers. This did nothing to endear them to the President, who wished to preserve the old way of life and traditions of the Boers. From his capital at Pretoria, not more than 35 miles distant, he visited the great mining and business community on only three occasions. He regarded them as a people apart and scathingly described Johannesburg in Biblical terms as, 'the city of the plains'.

In reply to one deputation from the Uitlanders he said: 'Go back and tell your people I will never give them anything; I shall never change my policy, and now let the storm burst.'¹ Johannesburg was almost a British town in a foreign land and President Kruger's Republic was the only place in South Africa where one white race was inferior to another.

The remarkable situation in the Transvaal was described in a speech made by Lord Kimberley in the House of Lords on 28 July 1899: 'They, a small community of Dutch farmers, living on their large farms, and leading rural lives, suddenly found their country invaded by a large and motley industrial mining population.' Lord Kimberley added that they now 'viewed with alarm the thought that the new population might entirely swamp the burgher population and destroy the condition of things to which they were accustomed, and which they desired to maintain'.²

In Johannesburg the Transvaal National Union formed by the leading Uitlanders took up the challenge. Rifles and ammunition were smuggled into the Rand by rail, concealed in oil drums and in trucks topped up with coke. Strongly supported by the biggest Rand industrialists, the National

Union had turned to revolutionary methods after constitutional agitation had failed.

Meanwhile to the north of the Transvaal, mainly because of the efforts and initiative of Cecil Rhodes, the British Government gained control of Rhodesia. The British also secured Bechuanaland in the west to prevent the possibility of the forming of a common border between the Transvaal and the territory under German control in south-west Africa. With a hold on Bechuanaland the British also made sure of keeping open the road going north to Rhodesia and beyond to central Africa. The Republic was almost encircled, so Kruger complained that he was 'shut up in a kraal'.

President Kruger then began to openly woo the German Emperor. At a dinner in Pretoria in January 1895, to honour the Kaiser's birthday, he said in proposing a toast: 'I know I may count on the Germans in future and I hope Transvaalers will do their best to foster the friendship which exists between them. I feel certain that when the time comes for the Republic to wear larger clothes you (Germany) will have done much to bring it about.'

Cecil Rhodes, who had come to the Cape from England when he was a young man, quickly made a fortune on the Kimberley diamond field. He also had large interests in the Rand gold mines. In 1890 Rhodes became the Prime Minister of the Cape Colony. The Colony had a majority Boer population and had been self governing since 1872. Rhodes found in the grievances of the Uitlanders an opportunity to advance his idea of a united South Africa under the British flag.

In December 1895 a small force of 500 mounted men with eight Maxim guns and three small field guns assembled at Pitsani on the Bechuanaland-Transvaal border, 25 miles north-west of Mafeking. The column was led by Dr Leander Starr Jameson. Outwardly the purpose of the mixed column of police from Bechuanaland and Rhodesia was to protect the railway under construction from Mafeking into Rhodesia. The real purpose as planned and directed by Cecil Rhodes was to support the revolutionists in Johannesburg. At a signal from the National Union Dr Jameson's force was to ride in and give support to an armed uprising on the Rand.

The date of the uprising was deferred when the plotters in Johannesburg became divided on the question of whether the Transvaal should form part of a Federated South Africa, or remain under the flag of the Republic after the Kruger regime was removed. Some Uitlanders wanted nothing more than full citizenship rights under the Republic. Others favoured the idea of a British Republic within a British Federated South Africa. Rhodes regarded such differences of opinion to be of little importance and considered the early adoption of the Union Jack as certain, once the Uitlanders gained citizenship.

Two messengers from Johannesburg reached Jameson at the base in Pitsani, one having travelled by train and the other on horseback. He was

¹ J. S. Marais, *The Fall of Kruger's Republic* (1961).

² Lord Kimberley was the Liberal Party leader in the House of Lords.

instructed not to cross the border. From Cape Town, Rhodes also informed Jameson of the postponement of the rising.

Disregarding all orders Dr Jameson advanced with his column across the border on 29 December 1895. Almost from the beginning of the desperate raid President Kruger was kept informed of its progress across the western Transvaal. Although telegraph lines were cut north and south of Mafeking and across the border of the Republic, there was nothing to prevent a fast riding courier proceeding 18 miles to Zeerust, where telegraphic communication with Pretoria was still open.

The raiders were overtaken by a messenger from Mafeking bearing a telegram from Sir Hercules Robinson, the British High Commissioner, with orders to withdraw. Although troubled by snipers Jameson and his men continued their advance towards the Witwatersrand. Nearing Krugersdorp, about 21 miles from Johannesburg, the column was headed off by the commandos. They camped that night within range of Boer snipers at nearby Luipaardsvlei. The next morning, 2 January, the raiders veering southwards engaged in a running fight until they were out-manoeuvred and stopped near the Doornkop kopje. Jameson and his men surrendered after General Piet Cronje promised to spare their lives.

The raiders were not supported from Johannesburg where there was considerable confusion and dismay at the news that Jameson had actually crossed the border. A troop of horsemen raised to support the rising, with an Australian detachment, was recalled after starting out towards Doornkop. A week later the columns of the Johannesburg *Critic* carried the following notice: 'A hat was picked up at Doornkop by one of the Australian Scouts bearing the name and number of the owner. It is now at the orderly room of the Australian detachment.'³

To cope with the tense emergency situation in Johannesburg caused by the Jameson invasion, more than 60 of the leading citizens hastily formed themselves into a Reform Committee and proceeded to issue arms. When the Government had the situation well under control, with the raiders safely locked up in gaol and after their Johannesburg supporters had laid down their arms, every member of the Reform Committee was placed under arrest and tried for treason in Pretoria.

Four of the Reformers were sentenced to death. In each case the sentence was commuted to a fine of £25,000. Rhodes and another prominent industrialist, Alfred Beit, paid the fines. The others received sentences of two years, or in default a fine of £2,000 upon undertaking not to take any further part in the affairs of the Republic. Sixteen of the Reformers were South African born. Only Walter Karri Davies, an Australian, and Aubrey Wools-Sampson, a South African, refused to pay the fine.

³ In the Africana Library at Johannesburg.

The Jameson Raid ruined Rhodes politically, forcing him to resign his office of Prime Minister. Even so, he continued to be returned by his burgher constituents at Barkly West. The British Government condemned the raid. The reaction in the Republic to the raid left President Kruger in a stronger position than before. Many of the young burghers who had previously favoured making concessions to the Uitlanders, now whole-heartedly supported the Government. The German Emperor telegraphed the President: 'I tender my sincerest congratulations that, without calling on the aid of friendly powers, you have succeeded in defending the independence of the country against attack from without. Wilhelm IR.'

Kruger gained much support at the Cape where the burghers lived in harmony under the British flag. One young man, J. C. Smuts, relinquished his British nationality and went to live in Pretoria.

Repercussions emanating from the raid continued. The Orange Free State, hitherto on good relations with the British, entered into a military pact with the Transvaal. Forts were built in the hills near Pretoria. The Transvaal imported heavy military equipment from Germany, bringing it in over the newly constructed Pretoria-Delagoa Bay railway. Originally President Burgers had been unable to build the railway for lack of funds but the Republic now possessed finance derived from resources developed by the skills of the Uitlanders. The land-locked Republic had at last succeeded in establishing a link with a seaport independent of the British.

Meanwhile the Uitlanders continued to petition the Government in the Transvaal. Their grievances were summarised in the Johannesburg *Critic* on 3 January 1896, a few days after the raid. 'What we contend for is the pacification of the Transvaal, on the basis of equal rights to every nationality, newcomers and old burghers, and this cause must prevail as the tide of the sea. It is the resistless march of progress and civilisation.'

The considered opinion of the Government was put by General Piet Joubert, in a speech made at a dinner in Potchefstroom on 2 January 1897, in the presence of the President and his executive. 'When the country was young and undeveloped,' he said, 'it was easy to legislate, because there were only 33 articles and it was an easy matter to get resolutions passed; but since gold was discovered here people no longer look down upon the Transvaal. People came here in shoals, and the result was that it was extremely difficult to legislate satisfactorily.' He concluded with saying: 'It should be our duty to see that the genuine and true citizens had their rights, while the others should be kept in their proper place.'

The Commissioner for Railways, Mr K. Smit, also spoke: 'They talked about race hatred in this country. There was no race hatred between the Italians and the French, and the Germans and the Transvaal people. If there

was any racial feeling, it was against the political opponents of 200 years standing.⁴

The Uitlanders petitioned Queen Victoria and a conference took place in Bloemfontein on 31 May 1899 between the President and the British High Commissioner, Sir Alfred Milner. On behalf of the Uitlanders, the Commissioner asked for a five year franchise to be made retrospective. The President offered a franchise after seven years residence, provided that all future disputes between the Governments were submitted to an arbitrator. The conference failed, for Kruger would not allow himself to be directed on matters affecting the internal matters of the country; neither would Milner agree to anything that seemed likely to weaken the position of Great Britain as the paramount power in South Africa.

In August the Republic made another approach through the State Attorney, J. C. Smuts, offering the franchise after five years with certain conditions, one of which involved the abandonment by Britain of her control over the Republic's foreign affairs. This was the crux of the matter, the question of full sovereignty for the South African Republic. Kruger, who tried for years to shake off every relative clause once ratified by the Volksraad to preserve his country from British influence, used the Uitlanders' grievances as a bargaining point. The British Government for its part was firmly resolved that the South African Republic should not become a full sovereign State and was not willing to lessen the British role as the paramount power in South Africa.

The problem of the Uitlanders was primarily an internal matter under the terms of the London Convention. Although some Boers both within and outside the Republic tried to persuade the old President to grant some concessions to the Uitlanders, he could not bend sufficiently. He was unwilling to offer the franchise on any basis that he thought would result in losing control of the Republic.

To find a solution more time and patience were needed. But the Uitlanders had no patience left and the British Government regarded the strongly armed Kruger regime as a threat to their supremacy in South Africa. In 1898 Sir Alfred Milner referred to 'the great game between ourselves and the Transvaal for the mastery in South Africa without a war'.

The British Government maintained that President Kruger wanted a Federated South Africa indoctrinated by the Transvaal. In 1881 he had appealed to the Orange Free State for assistance in the following terms:

⁴ Great Britain and Imperial War Office: *Further Correspondence Relating to Affairs in the South African Republic. Presented to Parliament by Command of Her Majesty, April 1897.* (Library of New South Wales number Q968.)

'Then shall it be, from the Zambesi to Simon's Bay, Africa for the Afrikaners.'⁵

Questioned regarding the aims of the South African Republic on supremacy, the First Lord of the Treasury, Mr A. J. Balfour, told the House of Commons on 1 February 1900: 'The conclusion we have formed upon this very important question, of course, is the result of the consideration of a vast number of particular circumstances which, at all events in my opinion, all lead up to the conclusion I have more than once expressed in public, and which the honourable gentleman has embodied in the question. But if he asks me whether there is any statement by President Kruger or President Steyn to this effect, whether they have ever announced in public that they were parties to this conspiracy and communicated the fact to any British official, whose words might be embodied in a Blue Book, of course this is not the case.'

On firmer ground, a repetition of events resulting in any adjustment similar to 1881, achieved either by diplomacy or by force of arms, could only incur a rapid decline of British power and prestige to the benefit of the Republic from the Limpopo River all the way to Table Bay.

The breakdown of the Bloemfontein Conference brought increased pressures. Few doubted any longer that war would come. By August the British troops in South Africa still numbered a few less than 10,000. At the beginning of October Britain prepared for hostilities by disembarking over 5,000 men from India in Durban. A further 6,000 troops were on the high seas coming from Britain.

On 27 August the Colonial Secretary, Mr Joseph Chamberlain, speaking in Birmingham, warned that 'the sands are running down'. He added: 'Having taken this matter in hand, we will not let it go until we have secured conditions which once and for all shall establish which is the paramount power in South Africa.' The British ultimatum that may have been sent was held back until sufficient troops were shipped and landed in South Africa.

On 9 October the British Agent in Pretoria received an ultimatum drawn up by Jan Smuts demanding the withdrawal of all troops from the Transvaal borders, the withdrawal from South Africa of the recently arrived troops and a promise that all troops at sea would not land at any South African port. The British reply stated that the conditions demanded by the South African Republic were such as Her Majesty's Government 'deem it impossible to discuss'.⁶ The ultimatum expired at 5 p.m. on 11 October 1899.

When the Assembly of Delegates met at Vereeniging in May 1902 to discuss the British Peace terms, Jan Smuts, then a successful General, said:

⁵ C. Headlam (ed.), *The Milner Papers*, Vol 1 (1931), p. 387.

⁶ Headlam, *The Milner Papers*, Vol 1, p. 558.

'I am one of those who, as members of the Government of the South African Republic, provoked the war with England.'⁷

The Boer population distributed throughout South Africa was variously affected by the war. About 10,000 Cape Boers fought with the Republics and were classified as rebels. The burghers in the Orange Free State had maintained good relations with the British since 1854. Their participation in the war was mainly one of honour under the terms of the Treaty with the sister Republic. Otherwise they had little to gain and everything to lose. The predominantly British population in Natal sent a petition to Britain asking for aid for the Uitlanders.

In the Great Trek the most intransigent and bitter burghers had trekked the farthest from British rule. These were the burghers in the Republic beyond the Vaal. Now it was no longer possible to temporise by trekking as too many neighbouring territories were already occupied in the interests of Britain.

In the Volksraad a number of leading burghers, including Chairman Lukas Meyer, Louis Botha and Piet Joubert, did not fully support the President in his policy towards the Uitlanders. They were also critical of the sending of the ultimatum, advocating a more conciliatory attitude. When the President accused his critics of failing to take the risk of war, J. H. ('Koos') De la Rey asserted his loyalty and declared that he would be still in the field when others had given up the fight. And so it proved.

Paul Kruger, a product of the bitterness of the Great Trek who lived and fought for the formation of his new country, led his people to war by challenging the British Empire. For 18 years he was President of the South African Republic and may fairly be said to have become the Father of his people. He said that God was on the side of the Republics and that God would direct every bullet when the British were being driven back into the sea. He also had hopes that a European power would intervene in some way. This was hardly possible because the British Navy held command of the seas. The alternative was the chance of some diversionary trouble occurring elsewhere which would require the presence of large numbers of British troops. Kruger must also have counted on a change of British policies, such as had so often taken place in the past. The Republics also had great hopes of a general uprising among the Boers in the Cape Colony.

The war of 1880-81 brought gains that were won because of the British policy of concessions following early reverses and a reluctance to put a large army in the field. In the House of Commons, however, Mr Joseph Chamberlain assured the House that there would be no second Majuba Hill, 'when the policy of magnanimity was a mistake'.⁸

Most of the burghers went to war with a light heart. Few realised what lay before them. They recalled how they had beaten the British Army before. Mr Schalk Burger, the Acting President of the South African Republic, later said: 'Undoubtedly we began this war strong in the faith of God, but there were also one or two other things to rely on. We had considerable faith in our weapons; we underestimated the enemy; the fighting spirit had seized our people, and the thought of victory had banished that of the possibility of defeat.'⁹

In Pretoria on the eve of the war there was jubilation when the news of the ultimatum became known. The town was also gay with flags and bunting, as the citizens celebrated the 74th birthday of the President on 10 October. Salutes were fired and the commandos paraded. In referring to the ultimatum and the withdrawal of the British Agent, Kruger stated on 11 October: 'War is certain. The Republics are determined that, if they must belong to England, a price will have to be paid which will stagger humanity.'¹

Despite the popular opinion that may have been held by the British public, expressed in such sentiments as 'the war will be over by Christmas', the difficulties of the struggle ahead were well known to responsible people. In 1896 Mr Chamberlain told the House of Commons: 'A war in South Africa would be one of the most serious wars that could possibly be waged. It would be in the nature of a civil war. It would be a long war, a bitter war, as I have pointed out already; it would leave behind it the embers of a strife which I believe future generations would hardly be long enough to extinguish.'

On the outbreak of the war Sir Alfred Milner wrote: 'We have a hard time before us, and the Empire is about to support the greatest strain on it since the Mutiny.' In fact, the Empire was about to place a larger army in the field than ever before in its history. Volunteers from the Empire overseas were quick to react with Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa all contributing contingents.

The response by the Australian colonial Governments was summarised early in 1902 by Mr Edmund Barton, the first Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Australia. On 14 January Mr Barton told the new Commonwealth Parliament: 'It is a war that has been forced upon the Empire. It is a just one, and ought only to come to one termination.' When stressing the need to raise and despatch an Australian Commonwealth Force to South Africa, Mr Barton affirmed in Parliament the same day: 'For the Empire is one nation, and if so much as one quarter is attacked, so is another.'

On 2 June 1902 the Acting Prime Minister, Mr Alfred Deakin, speaking

⁷ C. R. de Wet, *Three Years War* (1902), Appendix 'C', p. 495.

⁸ House of Commons debate, 5 Feb 1900.

⁹ Headlam, *The Milner Papers*, Vol 2 (1933), p. 362.

¹ In a telegram to overseas newspapers. Published in the *Times*, London.

at a public meeting held in the Melbourne Town Hall to mark the end of the war on 31 May, said: 'We might be justly reproached that as a people we entered into this contest too light heartedly. No one can say that we entered into it hastily. No well-informed person would say that we entered into it unjustly. We entered upon it as an actual war only under the last provocation of actual invasion.'

The New South Wales Lancers, the senior mounted regiment in the Colony, were the first colonial troops to arrive in South Africa from overseas. On 3 March 1885 the New South Wales Lancers (then called the Sydney Light Horse) had paraded to provide an escort for the Governor on the day that the embarking Sudan Contingent marched through the streets of Sydney. The regiment is now an armoured unit of the Citizen Military Forces.

The New South Wales Lancers visited England for the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1897. They competed in military tournaments against the British and Colonial cavalry.

A squadron of 106 lancers also went to England in March 1899, helped by public subscription but paying their own fares. After taking part in a military tournament at Islington the squadron trained at Aldershot for six months.

Led by Captain C. F. Cox, the men arrived at Waterloo Station from Aldershot on the morning of 10 October not many hours before the news circulated that Kruger had taken the final step. Their impending departure came on top of cabled offers by the Governments in Australia, New Zealand and Canada to assist the Mother Country by sending troops.

On the eve of the outbreak of the war the New South Wales Lancers received from the London public all the enthusiasm that the offers by the colonial Governments had stimulated. For the first time Londoners had the opportunity to cheer colonial troops about to leave on active service. Large crowds were waiting when the special train from Aldershot drew into Waterloo Station to the strains of 'Rule Britannia'.

Accompanied by the bands, drums and fifes of the Grenadier Guards the troops marched away through a flurry of miniature Union Jacks and Royal Standards bearing printed photographs of the Queen. At Mansion House the Lord Mayor waited in full regalia. In a short speech he thanked the friends and brothers from the Colonies who were going to assist the Mother Country in South Africa.

On the march to Fenchurch Street Station buses and cabs blocked the side streets and the bands could scarcely be heard for the cheering of the crowds as the metropolis really let itself go. Men and boys climbed over the street barriers thrusting small gifts upon the troops, who in turn parted with feathers from their plumed slouch hats. As the train pulled out for Tilbury patriotic fervour became intense; the crowd on the platform singing vig-

orously 'God Save the Queen' while the men leaned from the carriages shaking hands with all and sundry.

At Cape Town the Lancers paraded on the main deck of the *Nineveh* to be addressed by the Mayor who welcomed them as fellow colonists. In reply, Captain Cox said that the men were willing to go wherever they were sent. The troops signified their enthusiasm by making the wooden decks resound with the thumping of their lances. Along Adderley Street, decorated with bunting and lined with cheering crowds, 72 Lancers marched to the station bound for Stellenbosch, a remount depot outside the city. Five of the contingent had remained in London and 29 had to return to Sydney in the *Nineveh*. Many of these rejoined the unit later as reinforcements.

The early battles of the war took place on British territory. These involved the activities of the Natal Field Force in the retreat from northern Natal, the Kimberley Relief Column and Sir Redvers Buller's army for the relief of the Natal Force besieged in Ladysmith. Four months passed before fighting took place on the territory of the Republics.

Upon the expiration of the ultimatum the commandos invaded the colonies on three fronts in an effort to deliver the most telling blows before the arrival of further British troops. In the west they besieged the towns of Mafeking and Kimberley, at the same time severing the road to Rhodesia and the interior. In the east they poured through the Drakensberg passes in Natal as far as the southern bank of the Tugela River. The far northern Natal towns of Dundee and Newcastle were seized. The Ladysmith supply base lying in their path just short of the Tugela was encircled. The third thrust took place in the centre. There the commandos crossed the Orange River at Norval's Pont and Bethulie, occupying the railway town of Colesberg and the surrounding country and effectively severing the rail system from the Cape Colony sea ports.

Well armed and lightly mounted, the Boers were particularly mobile. They found the frontiers thinly guarded as there were no immediate reinforcements other than those raised from the loyal citizens of the South African colonies.

At first the military problems of the British were the great length of the frontiers open to invasion, the easy mobility of the mounted horsemen opposed to the regular foot soldiers and the disparity in numbers between the forces. Not surprisingly the British were held on the defensive.

With the exception of the Artillery Corps and the South African Republic Police, known as the ZARP (from the initial letters of their Dutch title) the Boer forces wore no uniform other than their every day farm clothing. They were entirely irregular. Hales, the Australian war correspondent, wrote: 'They were a strange motley-looking crowd dressed in all kinds of

common farming apparel, just such a crowd as one is apt to see in a far inland shearing shed in Australia.'

Contrary to all the recognised practices of war they were frequently in action and sometimes waited in ambush, wearing British khaki uniforms taken from captured soldiers. Armed with the Mauser, the most modern of German rifles, they showed themselves to be the finest fighting frontiersmen the world had seen. Not only did they have arms of the finest quality, but there were sufficient rifles available to give two to every burgher in the Republics.

A considerable number of Boers were armed with Martini Henry rifles, with which the Transvaal commandos were equipped up to the immediate pre-war years. Corporal A. F. Fitzhardinge, New South Wales Mounted Rifles, had this to say: 'The Boers use dumdums which make a noise like the crack of a stock whip beside one's ears. The Mausers make a hiss as they sail past. But the Martini Henry bullets sing like blowflies.'

The burghers operated on a terrain with which they were completely familiar—a landscape featuring hidden rivers, rocky hills called kopjes, and undulating plain known as veldt. Two months after the commencement of the war, Trooper G. E. L. Ramsay, a New South Wales Lancer, summed up the situation. 'The Boers know the country so well that it seems one Boer is as good as three British.' A few weeks later in January 1900 war correspondent Winston Churchill wrote in the London *Morning Post*: 'The Boers are worth each of them three to five of your regulars.'

The Boer artillery, a regular uniformed force well trained by German officers, was equipped with the most modern field guns; although as the war progressed they became numerically inferior to the British guns, the German Krupp and French Creusot batteries still outranged the British artillery.

Every burgher between the ages of 16 and 60 had to be prepared to fight. He also had to provide a horse with a saddle and bridle, a rifle, cartridges and provisions for eight days. A self-reliant individual, the burgher on commando rode lightly. His chief item of diet consisted of biltong (strips of dried meat). He made well-baked loaves from flour and raisins, known as Boer biscuits.

The commandos were raised by dividing the country into wards. At the head of each ward was the Field-Cornet, whose duty it was to get his burghers to the point of assembly to be formed into larger groups called commandos. The commando usually took its name from the district the burghers came from. The strength of a commando varied and could be from several hundred to several thousand. Usually about 10 per cent of the commando strength was back on the farms. They seemed to come and go as they pleased, no matter how much their presence was required on the field or how many were at home. With a long background as hunters backed

by the experience of fighting the Bantu, every man was self-reliant and skilled at taking cover on the veldt.

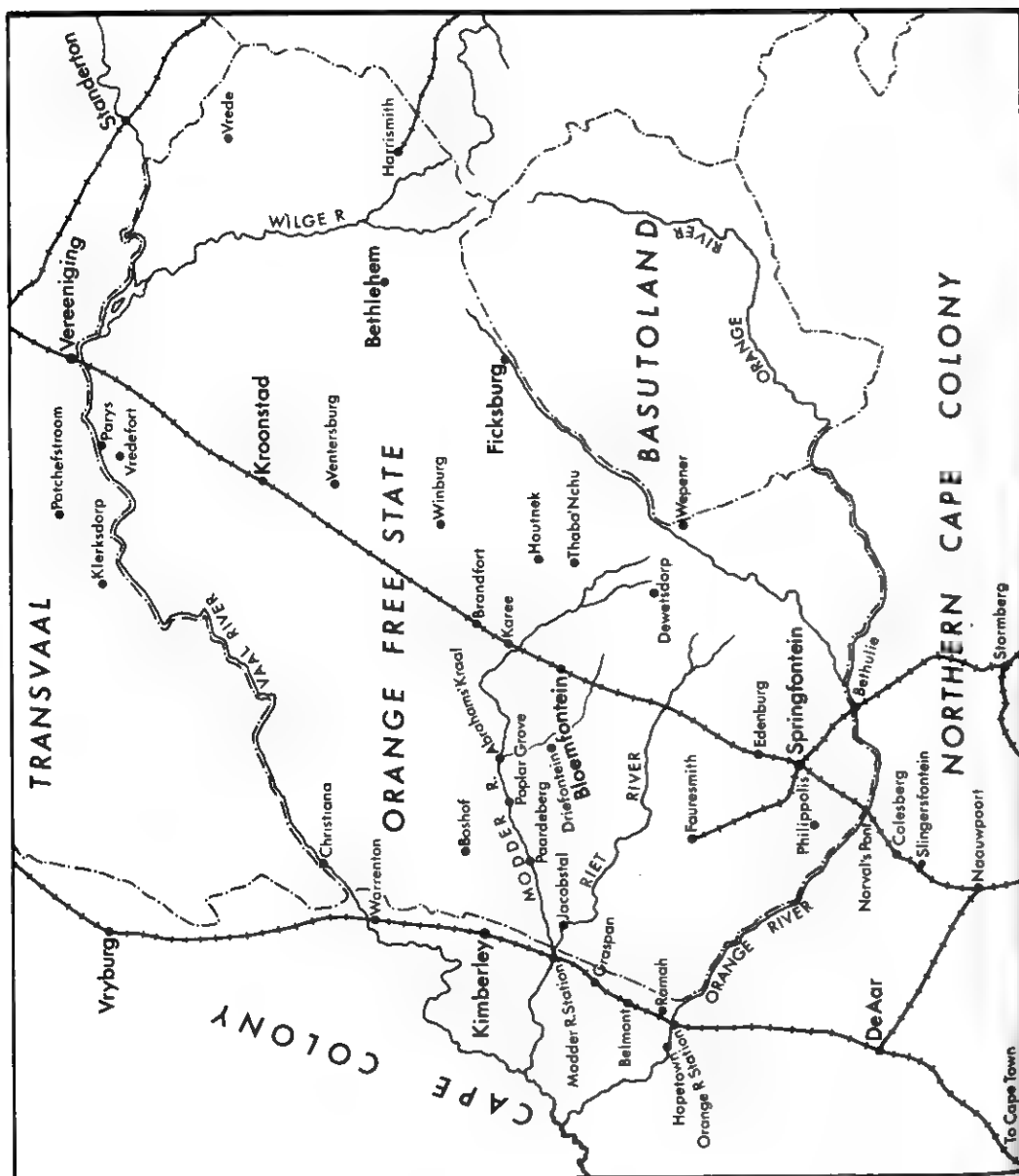
In the first months of the war the British had to contend with an enemy entrenched in well chosen positions. In these situations they found themselves for the first time opposed to the modern magazine rifle, with its rapidity of fire, extended range and smokeless powder. In addition the men behind the rifles were invisible. Sometimes the boulders on the kopjes were large enough and distributed in such a way that no artificial cover was necessary. But if the stones were small, the burgher built small protecting walls called sangars. His chosen position usually commanded a stretch of uncovered veldt. Over such a field of fire the attacking infantry always lost heavily. The burgher often found the range from stones on the veldt, marked and whitened beforehand. When the attack could not be stopped, the burgher kept on firing as the enemy soldiers scrambled up the side of the kopje. When the fight began to get too close he scampered down the far side to his pony, already saddled and waiting, and rode swiftly away.

Trooper C. E. Webster, serving with the New South Wales Lancers at the Modder River, wrote on 30 November 1899: 'It is the practice of the Boers you see to hide behind the rocks and not move until we are right on top of them as it were. Then they open fire and let us have it at close quarters. Frequently we have not the slightest notion of their whereabouts. The result is, often as not, that when we do meet them we have to fly for our lives. The Boers are very tricky, and do most of their fighting in this way. When we make it too hot for them in one place they clear to another, and begin their tactics all over again, and wait for our advance. That is really the way they fight.

'There is no fear of them coming out into the open, they are too cunning for that. We look upon it as a mere nothing now to go for a day without anything to eat or drink. As you perhaps know, every Boer is mounted, and each man keeps his horse handy in action in order to retire when the pressure becomes too hot.'

The commandos were not equipped with the bayonet, an unnecessary weapon for their style of fighting. In the beginning the British infantry marched forward, calmly and perfectly erect, even under the hottest fire. Cavalrymen often sat mounted and ready to take orders under fire at short range, without any attempt to protect themselves by lying close on their horses' necks. They were easy targets even though their courage under fire could not be faulted. Bennett Burleigh, the British war correspondent, wrote: 'Somehow our soldiers, by dint of perverse training, have imbibed the idea that there is something cowardly and sneakish about sitting behind cover in the field, or at any rate if they have to get into trenches or works, it is the Royal Engineers province to provide these trenches.'²

² Bennett Burleigh, *The Natal Campaign* (1900), p. 347.



Orange Free State

As the weeks went by things began to change. More use was made of cover. Swords were left behind. Bayonets, belt buckles, in fact any items of equipment that glittered in the bright South African sun, were painted khaki or discarded altogether.

It is not possible to establish exactly the number of men in the irregular Boer forces. Approximately 50,000 burghers from the two Boer Republics took part in the war. They were augmented by 10,000 rebels from the Cape Colony and Natal and about 2,500 foreign sympathisers in a total of approximately 62,500 pitted against the British. But they were not all in the field at the same time. The greatest number in the field at any given time was about 45,000 in December 1899. From then on the number in the field gradually declined, although they often received a temporary boost after some particular success. Following the fall of Pretoria in June 1900 the number in the field hardly ever rose above 20,000. After the first ten months of the war, the commandos fought purely in guerilla fashion.³

In the end the British placed a total of 448,000 men under arms. While every Boer carried an attacking rifle in the field, only a percentage of the British troops were pursuing the commandos. Many thousands of men were needed to guard the single-track railways over which long lines of supplies were hauled with constant danger of sections being torn up by roving commandos. Many more men were used as garrisons, for convoys or for hospital and administrative duties.

For the first time in its history the British Army, regulars and volunteers alike, was fully clad in khaki. The experiences of the first Boer war had shown that uniforms of red or blue were no longer practical, when once they had been of value in distinguishing opposing forces. The khaki blended in well with the South African landscape. The result was that on many occasions the Boers set fire to the grassy veldt to make the khaki clad figures more distinguishable.

Surprisingly, the British were without reliable or informative military maps. Even in territory that had for many years been under British control, no proper maps were available to the Staff. Lieut-General Sir Archibald Hunter, who went out to South Africa as Chief-of-Staff to General Sir Redvers Buller, said in despatches on 4 August 1900: 'Our maps are worse than useless, they are a positive danger and delusion.'

The functions of the army were severely tested by the problems of transport. Beyond the 5,000 miles of narrow gauge single track railways, most of which was in British territory, transport depended on roads that were poor or hardly more than tracks across the veldt. From such surfaces clouds of tell-tale dust rolled into the air from the long convoys in dry weather. On the other hand, after heavy rain, the wagon wheels ploughed through

³ L. S. Amery (ed.), *The Times History of the War in South Africa*, Vol 2 (1902).

deep mud drawn by wallowing teams of horses, mules or oxen. In a largely undeveloped country, road bridges and culverts were practically unknown so that at every river or spruit a drift, often steeply banked, confronted the convoy.

The turnover in transport animals was so great that by the end of the war no fewer than 200,000 horses and mules were lost, the carcasses lying widespread over the length and breadth of South Africa. When the war ended army rations were being drawn for 264,000 horses and mules, and 19,000 oxen.

The ponies used by the Boers were tough and wiry products of their particular environment, able to do well on the veldt grass and mealies. The horses used by the British were brought from overseas: from England, the Argentine, India and Australia. The worst feature was that these horses because of the emergencies of war did not get sufficient time to acclimatise. Usually they were sent up country without delay even in the fierce heat of summer and put to work on long military marches. Few of these horses could graze beneficially from the veldt, or were suited by mealies. Throughout the war the provision and carrying of fodder was always a major service factor. In camps and at staging places along the march the farriers, who travelled with their shoeing equipment (anvil, bellows, tools and shoes), were always in demand.

The Reverend James Green, an Australian padre, wrote: 'There is not the slightest doubt that from the first the Boer had an advantage over us, in that he rode the hardened native animal, which itself was the result of the peculiar necessities of South Africa.'⁴

The British soldier found himself for the first time opposed to the modern velocity magazine rifle expertly used by Europeans. In days not too long past when the rifle was reloaded after every single shot, the presence of the enemy could usually be seen by the smoke from the black powder. After receiving a volley at a comparatively short range the infantry could charge in the short interval while the enemy reloaded.

In the modern fighting of the Boer war all that had changed. The high velocity German Mauser rifle with the magazine was the equal of the British Lee Metford. The enemy kept under cover, while from an extremely long range his smokeless bullets pitted the red dusty earth. The advancing soldier often had difficulty in locating the exact source of fire.

The sufferings of the sick and wounded being borne from the battlefield were scarcely relieved by the problems of field transport. In the days before mechanised transport, movement was slow. After being carried from the field by stretcher bearers, the soldier would be taken to the nearest ambulance wagon, and there were not many of them usually available. All were fitted

⁴ In *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 1901.

with fairly rigid suspensions, so the way must have seemed long to the wounded man to whom every jolt brought increased pain.

From the mobile field hospital the patient was transferred to a stationary hospital, usually consisting of a number of galvanised-iron sheds. When he was well enough, the patient would be moved to the nearest railway on a wagon drawn by either horses or oxen. The slower plodding oxen moved at something scarcely above a crawling pace, yet this was usually more comfortable than the speedier horse-drawn vehicle. An eminent surgeon, Sir William MacCormac, told a Royal Commission on South African Hospitals in London in 1900: 'An ambulance wagon is a terrible means of transport in South Africa, where there are no good roads but many stones.' The Australian Major W. T. Bridges told the Commission: 'A soldier would take great pains to avoid an ambulance if he could get an ox-wagon.'⁵

Hospital trains were well equipped, carrying medical officers, nursing sisters, a kitchen and a dispensary. The hospital train at the railway was the closest the nursing sisters were allowed to the front line.

In the Australian Colonies the drift towards war was closely watched. On 10 July 1899 the first offer to send troops came from Mr J. R. Dickson, the Premier of Queensland, whose cable to London made available 250 mounted infantry and a machine-gun section. The offer prompted the Chairman of the Uitlander Council in Johannesburg to send a cable to the Premier on 8 August: 'Hearty thanks for the ready and practical manner in which the just cause of the Uitlanders in the Transvaal has been espoused by the Government and the people of your Colony.'⁶

By the end of July nearly 1,900 men from New South Wales had submitted their names for enlistment. Every Australian Colony offered to send volunteers. The Colonial Secretary informed each Government that he hoped the need would not arise.

On 28 July the New South Wales Premier, Mr G. H. Reid, received a cable from the Uitlander Council requesting support for the Uitlander petition that had been sent to Queen Victoria. The appeal was immediately circulated to the other Premiers. Public meetings were held pledging moral support for the Uitlanders. In Melbourne the Lord Mayor convened a meeting attended by leading citizens. The public was also kept informed of events taking place on the Rand from the Uitlander's point of view by the publication in the newspapers of letters sent home by the Australians residing in the South African Republic.

⁵ *Report of the Royal Commission Appointed to Consider and Report Upon the Care and Treatment of the Sick and Wounded During the South African Campaign.* (Library of New South Wales number Q.355.8)

⁶ *Queensland Parliamentary Debates*, 1899.

The Governor of Victoria, Lord Brassey, cabled the Colonial Secretary: 'The justice of the claims of the Uitlanders on which Her Majesty's Government insist, is fully recognised by popular opinion in Victoria, and several public meetings have been held in support of the policy of the Government. Numerous offers of service have been received from the Colonial forces.'⁷

On 28 September the Victorian Government convened a military conference, attended in Melbourne by the Commandants of all the Colonies. The conference favoured a scheme which, in the event of the outbreak of war, would result in a United Australia Military Contingent being offered to the Mother Country. It was to be a force of 25,000 men, more than half of whom would be mounted.

Before anything positive could be done the war broke out. The War Office in London immediately accepted the standing offers made by the individual Colonies, with the stipulation that two squadrons each of 125 men only would be accepted from New South Wales and Victoria and one squadron from each of the other Colonies.

The idea seemed to be that the contingents were to prove to the world that the Colonies were willing to follow the flag, rather than to have any direct military effect. Many thought that the Australians would see little of the front and would be used for lines of communication and convoy work.

In every Colony the troops marched through the streets of the capital cities to the ships, amid scenes of the greatest patriotic fervour. The *Medic* carried the Victorian, the Tasmanian and the South Australian troops. The Queenslanders with a mounted infantry and a machine-gun section sailed in the *Cornwall*. Early in the campaign it was found that the weight of the machine-gun, even when pulled by four horses, was such that it could not keep up with the column. The gun was finally handed over to the Royal Artillery at Kimberley. The New South Wales Contingent sailed in three troopships. The *Langton Grange* left Newcastle with horses and men of the New South Wales Mounted Rifles and the First Australian Horse.

The First Australian Horse was a bush volunteer regiment formed largely through the efforts of Colonel J. A. K. Mackay with squadrons drawn from a number of widespread country districts in New South Wales. In 1897 permission was officially granted by the New South Wales Government to raise the regiment. The regiment as a whole—402 men from a total strength of 410—went into camp for the first time over nine days during the Easter period in 1898.⁸

⁷ *Correspondence Relating to the Despatch of Colonial Military Contingents to South Africa.* (Library of New South Wales number Q968.)

⁸ See F. Wilkinson, *Australian Cavalry. The New South Wales Lancers and the First Australian Horse* (1901).

Both New South Wales and Victoria managed to persuade the Imperial Government to accept larger contingents than at first acceded to. The additional troops included the Australian Horse, a detachment of the New South Wales Lancers and a number of Special Service Officers. These officers were not attached to any particular unit and were drawn from the Permanent Forces. With the sanction of the War Office they were employed independently either on staff duties or with the columns as directed by the Commander-in-Chief, in order to gain experience.

On 28 October 1899 the first troops marched through the streets of Sydney from Victoria Barracks in pouring rain. The route taken, from the barracks to Circular Quay, nearly two miles, was lined with a throng estimated to be over 200,000 people. Everywhere the troops were greeted with wild cheering. Sections of the crowd joined in spontaneous singing, when the passing bands played 'Rule Britannia' and 'Soldiers of the Queen'.

Umbrellas and overcoats predominated. No amount of drenching rain seemed to dampen the enthusiasm of the crowd. Shops and residences along the way were decorated with red, white and blue bunting. Ribbons festooned the trams. Post boards proclaimed patriotic slogans, such as 'The Lion and the Kangaroo will put old Kruger through'. Small boys climbed and hung from lamp posts.

In Martin Place, near the General Post Office, the massed crowds barely left room for the troops to march past. At the corners where the festive crowds were thickest many could not even get a glimpse of the marching troops and had to be content with cheering. By the end of the march from most of the bayonets of the infantry small Union Jacks hung limply in the rain.

At the wharf, as the troops embarked, the owners of the troopship *Kent* entertained the Governor, Earl Beauchamp, the Premier of New South Wales (Mr W. J. Lyne), his Ministers and 500 prominent citizens in a specially renovated wharf shed. Bad weather outside the Harbour forced the *Kent* to anchor inside the Heads that night.

The next Friday, 2 November, the second body of troops left the barracks, marching past equally enthusiastic crowds. The afternoon was declared a holiday for all Government offices and visitors thronged the troopship. All the troops, mounted rifles, infantry and Special Service Officers, assembled aft as the visitors were going ashore. The men were addressed by the Chief Justice, Sir Frederick Darley, who drew rounds of applause when he said: 'Whether you come back with your shields or on your shields, I know you will bring back the honour of the Colony.'

Mr Lyne said they 'had become soldiers of the Queen, and whatever may take place, I am sure that your memory will live long in the hearts of the people of New South Wales'. The *Aberdeen* made a triumphant progress

down the Harbour, accompanied by swarms of small craft and amid bursts of cheering from the crowds along the foreshores.

By the middle of November the troopships were beginning to assemble in Albany Harbour in Western Australia. At the end of the month the first convoy with 1,200 men from the Australian Colonies and the First New Zealand Contingent steamed into the Indian Ocean bound for the fight with Paul Kruger's Transvaal Boers.

An editorial appeared in the columns of the *Queenslander*, summing up the significance of the event: 'So we have sent our little Contingent to the Transvaal War, and their going is an event which will not soon be forgotten.' The newspaper also referred to 'a straining in our hearts towards the welfare and honour of our soldiers on their first campaign'.

Lance-Corporal R. J. Doherty reported for duty after being absent without leave. To his dismay he discovered that his place in the Contingent was forfeited and already filled. A newspaper reported that, optimistically, Doherty hoped that public subscriptions would be raised to enable him to sail for South Africa independently, and make his own way to the front. Doherty's plight enlisted the support of generous citizens, and it was not long before he sailed in the steamer *Warrnambool*. In South Africa he joined Bethune's Mounted Infantry, a regiment formed in Natal.

Sergeant T. Hanley, a member of the South Australian Contingent, originally came from Ireland. He served with the Gordon Highlanders under Lord Roberts in the Afghanistan war. He also served with the Gordons at Majuba in the first Boer war. Although shot in the shoulder and in the right hand, he was the only man in his company to return from the hill alive.

In the Transvaal by the end of September most Australians in common with tens of thousands of other Uitlanders put whatever they could in suitcases, locked their doors behind them and left the Rand. The exodus from Johannesburg and other towns in the Transvaal became so great that the railways could not cope with the traffic. Thousands travelled to Cape Town, Delagoa Bay and Durban packed in open coal and cattle trucks.

Some idea of the mood and the experiences of the refugees is contained in the account of a New South Wales man, Mr James Hindman, President of the Geldenhuis Reef Mine; a resident on the Rand for the past five years. Two months before the war Mr Hindman sent his wife and children to Cape Town. The day before the declaration of Martial Law in Johannesburg he left on a train crowded with refugees. At the crossing of the Orange River into British territory the passengers burst into spontaneous singing of 'God Save the Queen'. Just across the bridge when Norval's Pont station came into view every man, woman and child came trooping from the carriages and the coal and cattle trucks, gathering together around the Union Jack streaming from the station mast. There they stood, singing with an intense feeling of relief and patriotic fervour 'God Save the Queen' and patriotic songs.

Another Uitlander, Mr Claude Lenthall, a Sydney civil engineer, wrote from Ladysmith to his brother in Sydney on 24 September 1899: 'Most of the Britishers have got a rifle, and all the spare time is spent in improving the shooting. Some people think there will be no war, but my own opinion is that it will be the bitterest war South Africa has seen. Natal is literally crowded with refugees. Every room in Ladysmith is full and people are sleeping on the bare ground, even those with money to pay for lodgings. Relief is being given out every day. How it will end God only knows. And 300 to 500 are coming every day; 1,500 the day the last despatch was received. Food has risen 20 per cent during the last week. All this will cost England heavily. The Dutch only set down patience as cowardice, and keep on telling us that they are going to have Natal in a fortnight after the war is begun.

'It cannot be very long before the rain falls, and that is all the Boers want. They will get their corn planted, and there will be grass and water everywhere. There will also be the wild tulip to poison the horses that are not used to it. England should have sent men and talked after. It would have saved hundreds of lives and a million in money at least, for more than that is already lost by the poor people who have had to bolt, and leave all at the mercy of these semi-white savages.

'War is a fearful thing, but it would be worse still to settle the matter without fighting. We would be despised by the Kaffirs and, worse still, we should lose all our self-respect and deserve the name of coward which the Boers give us, besides probably having trouble with the Zulus. I sleep with my ammunition and rifle beside me, in case the signal guns are fired to turn out at once to repel the assault.

'We are only 34 hours from the Free State borders where they are said to have 8,000 men ready, while we have 5,000 in and about Ladysmith. More than half the Government stores for the prosecution of the war are here for us to defend. The Boers have promised to wipe out Ladysmith first, so as to cripple our advance.

'I hope the Australian Contingent will come. Every bushman is worth three soldiers because they can take care of themselves besides fighting. If we can get the best of the first fight the rest will be easy, as they believe one Boer is equal to 40 Englishmen. They are very confident.'

Mr J. A. Smith wrote from Durban on 5 October 1899 to a relative at Manilla, New South Wales: 'The railway service is wholly taken up with troops and stores going to the front, and unless the British want to remove the Union Jack from the South African Colonies, they are not being hurried up a day too soon. One cannot describe the hatred between the two races — "bitter" is too sweet a term. The Boers boast that they will occupy not only Maritzburg but also Durban within a month. The matter must be settled this time. The only argument the Boer will listen to comes from a rifle. It's

going to be — “remember Majuba and Colley”. There is terrible destitution among the Rand refugees, the parks and other places are crowded with tents.’

Another New South Wales man, Mr Christopher Butler, wrote from Durban: ‘As I am likely to be ordered to the front any day, I take the chance offering now to drop a line. You will be interested to learn that my late partner Ted is in the Imperial Light Horse, which has just finished its first engagement. Wools-Sampson, the reformer who was in gaol for high treason, raised the Corps and is reported wounded.’

‘You may have heard that I was in gaol, tried for high treason, and after 10 days trial the prosecution was withdrawn and I was released. I was accused of having enlisted 2,000 men. I was too fly for them, however, and they could prove nothing. I stayed in Johannesburg until the place was nearly deserted, and all the doors and windows of businesses and private houses were nailed up and barricaded. I got the tip to clear out, but otherwise intended to stay. I locked the door, and also the office door, and left things to take their chance, and accompanied by Galbraith, my partner, came down here.’

‘We could only get a passage on a coal truck, 48 of us, standing room only. We came via Delagoa Bay and stayed there two days before shipping here in the *Arundel Castle*. There were 1,500 passengers for Durban alone. I was too late for the Imperial Light Horse, but got into this company (Natal Mounted Infantry).

‘We are longing for a go at the Boers. I promise you, old chap, I will not disgrace my relations. I will die, but not run; I don’t care if I get shot, as long as I get two or more Boers first. I long to ride to Pretoria and say, “How do you do”, to the officials who tried to hang me. We will be off to the front in a day or two. I am in ‘A’ Troop. I will die game or get to Pretoria with a rifle on my shoulder.’

Mr John Moffatt, an architect from New South Wales with a practice in Johannesburg, left the town early in October. ‘I got away from Johannesburg in a coal truck, although we had to pay a first-class fare. The Boers had the pleasure of going to the front in first-class carriages, in which they were leaving on the opposite side of the station to which we were. It was a very busy day at the station. There were three trains of Boers going to the front — the Johannesburg commando, the Krugersdorp commando, and the Klerksdorp commando. One thing that struck me forcibly was the large crowd of women and children who had come to the station to see their relations off to the front. They were all dressed in holiday attire, and were laughing and joking as if the men were going to a picnic. They took the affair as a foregone conclusion, and thought they were only going to pick off a few “Rooineks”. The idea never entered their heads that they might get shot in return. They were all armed with Mauser rifles, and wore double bandoliers. I travelled in the trucks as far as Naauwpoort, where I got into a saloon.’

Almost two-fifths of the mounted troops used by the British came from the colonies. Of these South Africa provided the largest contingent. The response to the war effort by the South African colonials, the Uitlanders and those who made their own way to the Cape from Australia and New Zealand and elsewhere, is shown by the figures given for those irregular corps which served with such distinction. Field Marshal Lord Roberts stated in the House of Lords that: ‘No less than 46,858 volunteers from the South African colonies took part in the war.’⁹ General Christiaan de Wet described the Cape volunteers as ‘sweepings who sold their souls and patriotism for 5/- a day’.¹

The official overseas colonial contingents were headed by Australia with 16,175 men, followed by New Zealand with 6,513; Canada 6,500, and India and Ceylon, 535. Although fewer in numbers, the troops from the British communities outside the British Isles volunteered in the same spirit as in the greater efforts of 1914 and 1939. The coloured volunteers from the overseas colonies were not accepted, nor were the regular coloured troops of the Indian Army used.

In his final despatches to the War Office on 23 June 1902 the Commander-in-Chief in South Africa, General Kitchener, said: ‘I find it difficult in the short space at my disposal to acknowledge the deep obligations of the Army in South Africa to the Governments of Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Cape Colony and Natal. I will only say that no request of mine was ever refused by any of these Governments, and that their consideration and generosity were only equalled by the character and quality of the troops they sent to South Africa, or raised in that country.’

No other Corps served with greater distinction in the war than the squadrons of the Imperial Light Horse, first raised in Pietermaritzburg in September 1899. The men were a picked force of Uitlanders, most of them being Australians. The force first went into action at the battle of Elands-laagte. It went on to become one of South Africa’s most famous regiments in both World Wars. In the Boer War its strength was raised to 1,200 men.

The record of the regiment in the Boer War is perpetuated by the memorials erected on the battlefields. Wherever they are they bear these words: ‘Tell England, ye who pass this Monument, we who died serving her, rest here content.’ Today the Imperial Light Horse is called the Light Horse Regiment. General Sir Archibald Hunter, Chief-of-Staff to Sir George White in Ladysmith, when asked about the Imperial Light Horse after the war testified: ‘They were the finest Corps I have ever seen in my life.’²

The Imperial Light Horse was first raised by Walter Karri Davies, an Australian (as mentioned earlier), and the South African born Aubrey

⁹ J. Stirling, *The Colonials in South Africa, 1899-1902* (1907).

¹ de Wet, *Three Years War*.

² Stirling, *The Colonials in South Africa, 1899-1902*.

Wools-Sampson. Both men were members of the Reform Committee in Johannesburg; Paul Kruger had no more determined opponents. The two men raised funds sufficient to equip a mounted regiment. From thousands of Uitlander refugees they enlisted 500 picked men, chosen for horsemanship, skill as marksmen, and knowledge of the veldt. The two founders first offered their services without payment to the Imperial authorities.¹

The Natal Government supported the raising of the regiment, and the Imperial Government sanctioned its formation on the conditions and rates of pay normally applicable to colonial raised regiments. Both Karri Davies and Wools-Sampson, however, again refused to accept any financial remuneration for their services. The co-founders were gazetted Majors before the war began, and the regiment went into action within six weeks after authority was granted for its formation.

Aubrey Wools-Sampson was born near Cape Town. He served with a volunteer corps in the Zulu War in 1879, and was present at the battle of Ulundi. He also served with volunteer corps in the defence of Pretoria against the Boers in 1880-81, when he was severely wounded in close individual fighting.

On 21 October 1899 Wools-Sampson was wounded in the battle of Elandslaagte while advancing with the Imperial Light Horse. He continued to serve with the Imperial Light Horse until early in 1901, when he joined the Intelligence Corps. Lieut-General Sir Ian Hamilton said he was an 'unrivalled Intelligence Officer'. In despatches on 1 November 1901 General Kitchener reported: 'A most excellent and efficient Intelligence run by Wools-Sampson.'

For his services Wools-Sampson was created a knight. He also became an Honorary Colonel in the British Army. Colonel Sir Aubrey Wools-Sampson died in Johannesburg on 19 May 1924.

Born in 1867 and educated at Scotch College, Melbourne, Walter Davies was a consulting engineer. He was engaged in the mining industry at Broken Hill in New South Wales until ill-health forced him to take a long sea voyage. Thus it came about that he found himself in South Africa, at a time when the development of the Rand was taking place. In South Africa he spent the best years of his life, the years for which he will be most remembered.

As a Rand citizen and business man, Davies became widely known as an importer of the Western Australian jarrah and karri timbers, used in the gold mines and for sleepers on the rapidly expanding South African railways. His business ventures prospered. In order to particularly identify himself, he changed his name to Walter Karri Davies. He became generally known as 'Karri'.

¹ The Karri Davies papers in the Africana Library, Johannesburg.

In the momentous days when the Jameson Raiders were riding in it was feared in Johannesburg that reprisals would be made against the town. It was then that the Reform Committee was hastily formed to deal with an explosive situation. The Government withdrew the police force. At the Consolidated Goldfields Office more than 2,000 rifles were issued to volunteers. Trench-works were hastily dug and manned. Australian volunteers enlisted at the office of the Australian Association. An Australian Corps 800 strong took up arms for the defence of the town and to preserve order. Karri Davies was stationed at the Robinson Deep Mine with a detachment of 150 men, chiefly from the Australian Corps. The mine headgear was used as a lookout.

Without firing a shot the townspeople accepted the advice of the British Agent, Sir Jacobus de Wet, to lay down their arms. President Kruger offered an amnesty to all, with the exception of the Reform Committee. In company with the other Committee members, Karri Davies and Wools-Sampson were convicted of treason against the State and imprisoned in the Pretoria gaol. Unlike the other Reformers the two men refused to 'give their written word of honour that they will not take part for the future, either directly or indirectly, in any external or internal politics of the Republic, and that they will conduct themselves as orderly and obedient inhabitants of the State'.⁴

Both men were kept in prison until the President decided to release them unconditionally on 22 June 1897, to mark the occasion of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. They had served 15 months of a two years sentence. On returning to Johannesburg they received a hero's welcome.

Karri Davies had a distinguished war record. He fought in the front line in the early battles at Elandslaagte and Wagon Hill. He was the first to enter Mafeking ahead of the Relief Column. Towards the end of the war the regiment supported Lord Milner's policy of unconditional surrender, in contrast to Lord Kitchener's proposals for a negotiated peace. The regiment was prepared to fight on until unconditional surrender was enforced. The Governments of Natal and Australia also agreed that unconditional surrender must precede concessions.⁵

In his wartime diary written in the field, Karri Davies wrote: 'So long as a single Boer remains in the field with a rifle, so long will I remain and fight it out.'⁶ Even after the passage of the years the impact of those words coming from the pencil of Karri Davies when on the march clearly reveal the nature of the opposition of the Uitlander to the policies of the Government led by Paul Kruger.

⁴ *The Times*, London, 1 June 1896.

⁵ Headlam, *The Milner Papers*, Vol 2, p. 329.

⁶ From his war-time Diary in the Africana Library, Johannesburg.

Major Karri Davies accepted neither pay, promotion or award for his service in the war. In a letter to General Kitchener he said that the honour of serving was sufficient reward. He stayed on duty throughout the war with the Imperial Light Horse, the Regiment that he helped to raise. In the latter part of the war he acted as a supply officer for the regiment, and was in charge of recruiting.

When peace returned Karri Davies became a consulting engineer in Johannesburg. He was engaged by Lord Milner to make recommendations for dam and irrigation works along the Orange River. On his report South African flocks were built up by the importation of Australian merino sheep. Eventually he returned to Western Australia where his family had a property in the country at Karridale, about 200 miles south of Perth.

In 1915 Karri Davies sailed for London to offer his services in World War I. With the rank of Honorary Colonel in the British Army he joined a British Government Mission to the West Coast of the United States where, as Liaison Officer propagating British interests, he had offices and staff in Los Angeles and San Francisco.

Colonel Walter Karri Davies died in London on 28 November 1926. He had served the British Empire well as a soldier and a patriot. In 1905 he disclosed that 'by order of the King, I was graciously granted the privilege of serving through the 1899-1902 war without decoration or distinction of any kind'.

CHAPTER 4

The retreat to Ladysmith and the siege

From the outbreak of the war, Major-General Sir William Penn Symons waited at an advanced camp at Dundee. That part of northern Natal, thrust like the thin end of a wedge between the Orange Free State and the Transvaal, was exposed to attack on three sides. The difficulty of defending the area with few troops was discounted against the certain adverse political results if Britain vacated territory to the enemy so early in the war. Here in northern Natal the first serious engagement of the war took place.

Although for some days British scouts were in contact with isolated groups of Boers, they did not learn the location of the commando until dawn on Friday, 20 October when shells began to fall on the British camp from a range of 3,400 yards. A gunner killed by a shell became the first soldier to fall in the war. During the night a commando 4,000 strong led by Lukas Meyer, the Chairman of the Volksraad, had taken up a position on Talana Hill overlooking the town from the east. Having dragged six field guns up the hill, he waited in this chosen position for the British attack.

Early that morning British infantry advancing to the foot of the hill took cover in a donga. A mile of sloping ground lay between them and the

enemy on the crest of the hill. Without having breakfasted and in falling rain, they waited while the batteries engaged the enemy guns. The soldiers 2,000 strong, with damp khaki clinging to their shoulders, suffered only slight losses in reaching a thin grove of Australian blue-gum trees and a stone wall near Smith's Farmhouse.

Here General Penn Symons came galloping across open ground under heavy fire, taking his horse over a fence to reach the cover of the trees. The general was attended by his staff and a mounted orderly carrying a lance with a red pennant which served as a marker for despatch riders with messages for the general. On this fatal morning it also served as a guide for the Mausers as the general made an identifiable target when soon after 9 o'clock he left the cover of the trees with his staff to examine more closely the ground out in front. He was shot immediately. Mortally wounded, Penn Symons rode supported on his horse to the guns in the rear. The command fell to Colonel J. H. Yule, who took the local rank of brigadier-general.

After two and a half hours waiting in extended formation behind the wall, the soldiers launched themselves up the hill into an open field of fire. All morning the enemy had remained concealed. Not a man was seen. Moving steadily up the gentle slope in open ground and sometimes slipping on the soft rain-affected surface, the men crossed another low wall and began to lose heavily under the fire from 4,000 Mausers. The losses of the officers who walked up in front, uprightly leading the men, were heavier in proportion. Yet the line did not waver up the last pinch to the crest which was taken by a bayonet charge against the few defenders left to form a rearguard as Lukas Meyer and his commando had already retreated. They rode away, ready to fight another day.

From Talana Hill mud-stained, wet and hungry at the end of a long day of marching from dawn to dark the British infantry passed through Dundee to the camp a few hundred yards north of the road to Glencoe, leaving the Indian stretcher bearers searching the slope for the dead and the wounded.

Talana Hill gave the infantry its first experience of modern massed rifle fire. It was something of a Pyrrhic victory, the first of a number of such victories gained in the months ahead. The cost was high, with 447 officers and men killed, wounded or missing. The fight must also have done something to change the opinions of the young Boers, who believed in the legend of Majuba and the cowardice of the British soldier.

On the following day as the commandos closed in from the north and west, shells fell on Dundee again. Yule knew he could not defend the town indefinitely. Leaving the wounded in the hospital and abandoning camp supplies, the column set out on a forced night march. From 9 o'clock at night until 9 in the morning the long lines tramped the Helpmaker road.

Not until 10 o'clock did the Boers learn that the tented camp at Dundee was held only by the wounded and the hospital staff.

A few hours after the Boers entered the town, General Penn Symons died from his wounds. With a Union Jack for a shroud he was buried in the Anglican churchyard in the centre of Dundee. Twelve days later the Boers moved the British wounded by train to Ladysmith, where they were accommodated in temporary wards set up in churches.

Gunner A. Miller, serving in the 67th Field Battery, Natal Field Force, wrote to his parents at Thebarton, a suburb of Adelaide: 'I was in the thick of the fighting at Dundee. The scene of the fight was terrible. There was nothing but shells and rifle bullets flying around. Men running here and there, men and horses shot down, wagons containing the wounded up-turned, and above all the cries of the wounded for help.'

A Victorian serving with the Town Guard at Dundee (Mr Walyn from Coburg) related his experiences in escaping to Ladysmith: 'I had a hard time of it. We had only 10 minutes notice to clear out of the town, and I had been on guard almost continuously for over a week, before the troops left in the night for Ladysmith. A picket came and told the Town Guard to leave at once as the Boers were going to shell the town. I was on guard at the magazine and could not even go home, but had to leave at once with only the clothes I stood up in and not a penny in my pocket. Before we left the magazine the Boers put a shell within 40 yards of us, splashing us with mud, but fortunately it did not explode. Then we ran to another place for shelter, and another shell landed in front of us. We then made towards the Zululand border, and stayed at Rowan's Farm all night.

'At daybreak the Boers started to shell the place, it being six miles out of Dundee. We soon cleared out, and nearly ran into a Boer patrol. Then we got into the Indumeni Mountain, and decided to stay till dark in a cave. While there three British soldiers took refuge in a cave about 14 yards below us. The Boer patrol (about 200 men) found them out and shot them all, but not before the soldiers killed a few of them. They sold their lives dearly. The bullets were potting all around, but neither myself nor my mates were touched. About 11 o'clock that night we decided to make another try to find Ladysmith. The other six of the party had not got very far before they lost each other, and I left with only one companion.

'We managed to go a short distance when I felt so exhausted that I sat down and fell asleep at once, and I never saw my mate again. About daylight I managed to strike a Kaffir kraal, and the natives gave me a drink and showed me which way to avoid the Boers, but advised me not to travel in daylight. I slept on a flat stone on a hill till midnight, then made tracks again and travelled till near daylight, when I ran into a picket who said he had orders to take all stragglers before the officers—he belonged to the 18th

Hussars. He was very kind, gave me a drink out of his bottle and told me he would get his mates to give me something to eat. When we got into camp I had to go before the officers and report what I had seen, etc.

'It happened to be the troops from Dundee that I fell in with, so I kept with them all the way to Ladysmith. We marched all night, in the pouring rain (it had been raining without stopping for five days) and arrived safe at Ladysmith on Thursday morning, having left Dundee the Saturday before. On Friday morning I saw in the paper that the Boers had taken out the Dundee Town Guard and two civilians and shot them on the Square, but that was not correct although several are prisoners. I am the only one of those I started with that has been heard of and it is supposed the others have been taken prisoner.'

Meanwhile, a Johannesburg commando had attacked the railway station at Elandslaagte, capturing a goods train with supplies for Dundee and cutting communications between Dundee and Ladysmith. British patrols ranging 15 miles from Ladysmith found the enemy in full force, established with artillery on a ridge in a range of kopjes a mile and a half south-east of Elandslaagte station. On the afternoon of 21 October troops from Ladysmith led by Major-General John French reached Elandslaagte by train.

Preceded by artillery exchanges 950 infantrymen approached the kopjes across open ground under heavy fire, the Devonshire Regiment moving directly in front and the Manchester Regiment and the Gordon Highlanders on the right. A heavy rainstorm accompanied by thunder and lightning broke over the veldt, soaking the men to the skin. The attack developed on the right flank where four squadrons of the Imperial Light Horse joined the Manchesters and the Gordons.

The light horsemen, with ranks full of Uitlanders, were determined to wipe out any reproach remaining from the indecision of the Jameson Raid. Dismounting when the rise became too steep, they led the charge with the Gordon Highlanders to the topmost ridge. Losses were heaviest when they were held up by a barbed wire fence. The men had no wire cutters, so the posts had to be pulled out of the ground. In the close fighting between Uitlanders and the Johannesburg commando many men who had met before came face to face. The German gunners fought by the guns to the last. Colonel Schiel, a Prussian and a gunnery instructor, was shot through the legs and taken prisoner. (He had once been Commandant of the Johannesburg Fort; later he became Chief of the Prisons Department.) In a letter passed by the censor at the prisoner of war camp at Simonstown on 27 February, he wrote to a friend in North Sydney: 'It was a strange feeling at Elandslaagte, when lying wounded on the battlefield and recovering from unconsciousness. The first faces I saw were Johannesburg friends in the Imperial Light Horse. The officer who took me prisoner was one of my

best friends, an Australian named Karri Davies. That really is the fortune of war.'

Schiel was the Prison Commandant in Pretoria during the term served by Karri Davies and Wools-Sampson. In *The Times History of the War in South Africa* L. S. Amery wrote that 'Colonel' Schiel was an ex-sergeant in the Prussian Army who had been in South Africa for some years.

In falling darkness the commando, beaten and broken up, fled from the Lancers who, waiting on the flanks, picked off many of them. On the kopjes the lamps of the parties searching for the wounded flickered in the darkness under a steady drizzle. Stretcher bearers carrying the wounded kept falling on the rocks. Many wounded were of necessity left in their agony all through the long cold night.

The Imperial Light Horse lost their leader, Lieut-Colonel John Scott-Chisholme, killed on the top of the kopje. Among the wounded were three members of the Reform Committee who had been in the Pretoria prison: Captain C. H. Mullins, Lieutenant M. Currie, and Major Aubrey Wools-Sampson, who received a severe wound in the hip. He spent the next few months in hospital in Ladysmith.

Trooper E. H. Cross wrote to his father in New South Wales on 27 October from Ladysmith: 'So far I am safe and have been through three engagements. I send you the papers with a fair account of our Battle of Elandslaagte. We had an awful time of it, and I saw sights I shall never forget. I am sorry our Colonel Chisholme was shot. He was leading us right through the thick of it, and as proud of his youngsters as possible. Major-General French complimented us on our fine display, and the Gordon Highlanders who followed us say we acted splendidly and showed them points in the Boer type of warfare. A lot of my chums are wounded and some killed. We have just returned from 48 hours patrol with very little to eat; biscuits and bully beef and any water we could find.' Before the war ended Cross returned to Australia. On 30 April 1902 he arrived back in South Africa, disembarking at Durban as a lieutenant in the 3rd Battalion, Australian Commonwealth Horse.

Battle honours won by the Imperial Light Horse at Elandslaagte included Victoria Crosses awarded to Captain C. H. Mullins and Captain R. Johnstone. The gazette conferring the honours read: 'On 21 October 1899 at Elandslaagte when, at a most critical moment, the advance became momentarily checked these two officers very gallantly rushed forward under this heavy fire and rallied the men, thus enabling the flanking movement which decided the fate of the day, to be carried out.'

Doctor R. W. Hornabrook, an Australian attached that day to the Natal Mounted Rifles, attended the wounded on the field. When assisting Boer wounded he suddenly found himself right in the path of a group of fleeing burghers. Without much difficulty the doctor convinced them that they

were in fact surrounded by the Lancers. On his advice they quietly stacked up their rifles. Among the burghers were several white-haired old men, and several boys of about 16 years. The Australian expressed his indignation that men so old should be sent to fight. 'And these boys, how could a Lancer kill them? Why, he should want to take them up on his saddle and skelp them!' To which one old man replied: 'It is the law of the Republic, old and young, we can all use the rifle!' The triumphant doctor led his prisoners into Elandslaagte station.

The victory at Elandslaagte cost the British 258 killed, wounded and missing.

Mr A. South left New South Wales to farm in the Transvaal. He served in the Zulu war, then took up farming again with a bullet from the war still lodged in his body. He wrote to a friend in New South Wales giving an account of his experiences at the time of Elandslaagte: 'Just a few lines to let you know that I have got fairly safe through the Boer lines. I got down alright to within 16 miles of Ladysmith, when I found myself surrounded by a commando of about 200 Boers. Of course I had to surrender as I could not fight the lot myself. They took all my cattle, horses and wagons, and took myself and my boys prisoner. They did not treat us badly on the whole excepting that I and eight others were sentenced to be shot (which was not exactly kind of them).

'On the morning of the Elandslaagte fight, when I am glad to say Tommy. Atkins gave them something to think about, as I did not see any reason why I should walk, I caught two Boer horses during the fight, and with one of the commando's saddles, I left without thanking them for their hospitality. All I had left was the clothes I stood up in. I would have been to the front, but this old wound of mine prevents me, as I cannot pass the medical examination.'

Trooper F. J. Concreve, serving with the Imperial Light Horse, wrote to his family at Coolgardie (Western Australia) from the prison camp at Waterval, north of Pretoria, on 22 April 1900: 'You will see that I got to Pretoria a bit ahead of my general. I was captured at Elandslaagte on the 21st and was brought here. I was taken early in the morning while out as advanced guard to a picket. We did not expect to find any of the enemy and knew nothing of them until we were near the top of the kopje, when we were met by a shower of bullets. The rest of the party got away I believe, but I dismounted and got behind a rock and held out for two and a half hours. But as no assistance came and the Boers had worked up to within 50 yards of me, and were shooting at me from there, I considered I had done my duty, and was not called upon to sacrifice my life.

'So much against my will, I surrendered. The odds were 150 to 1. The nearest friends were 2,000 yards away, and did not seem to be coming any closer. About two hours after I was captured the artillery opened fire and

I had to stand a bombardment from our own guns. A general engagement took place, and I do not know the result. I am getting on alright here, so you need not worry about me.'

Yule's Natal Field Force reached Ladysmith at 6 a.m. on 26 October wet, tired and bedraggled from marching on roads so affected by torrential rain that the men and horses in the column sometimes had to wade over their knees in liquid mud. But they suffered no losses from enemy action for General Sir George White, commanding at Ladysmith, intercepted and delayed challenging commandos in an engagement at Rietfontein Farm.

Colonial volunteers took part in every clash leading up to the retreat to Ladysmith. In despatches Sir George White acknowledged the outstanding services of Colonel J. Dartnell, Commissioner of Police for Natal, whose exceptional knowledge of the country contributed largely to the safety of the column on the long march back. Trooper Richardson, a lad from Cootamundra, served with the Natal Volunteers at Talana Hill, and subsequently on the forced return march.

Gunner Miller wrote to his parents in South Australia: 'We had to retire on Ladysmith by an unknown track, over hills and through swamps and mud. During the retreat some nights we only moved at the rate of one mile in two hours. When we reached Ladysmith the men and horses were done up and nearly starved. We were dying for want of sleep.'

Ladysmith, a small galvanised iron-roofed town of 4,500 citizens, rested on a small plain through which flowed the Klip, a northern tributary of the Tugela River. Immediately beyond the town the railways from the Orange Free State and the Transvaal junctioned, connecting with the line to Pietermaritzburg and the port of Durban.

When the British fell back to Ladysmith they held the inner circle of kopjes surrounding the town. Beyond stretched a higher and almost complete circle of hills on which were the guns of the Boers. The Ladysmith plain, with a length of about five miles and an extreme width of about four miles, now held a population swollen to 20,000 together with a large accumulation of military stores and supplies. Sir George White chose to make a stand there with the intention of detaining the enemy until relief came. In this way Pietermaritzburg and Durban were kept secure, for in the weeks ahead the Boers did not advance in strength with such a large force left intact behind them.

In his despatches Sir George White wrote: 'I saw clearly that so long as I maintained myself there, I could occupy the great masses of the Boer armies, and prevent them sending more than small flying columns south of the Tugela. Accordingly I turned my whole attention to preparing Ladysmith for a prolonged siege.'¹

¹ To Lord Roberts, from Cape Town, 23 Mar 1900.

The Boers, under General Joubert, having occupied Dundee reoccupied Elandslaagte and advanced to within 12 miles of Ladysmith. They held the railway all the way from Pretoria almost to Ladysmith. The retreating British made no attempt to damage the line or to destroy the tunnel at Laing's Nek, close to the Natal-Transvaal border. The Boers lost no time in bringing up siege guns by rail. They surrounded Ladysmith with gun emplacements.

In an effort to overcome the long-range artillery superiority held by the enemy, White telegraphed for naval guns. These were two 15-pounder and two 4.7-inch guns hastily set up on improvised wooden carriages at the naval workshops in Simonstown. They arrived on 30 October by one of the last trains from the south. Although so few they were the only guns capable of reaching the enemy positions, thus giving the defence some parity with the Creusots. The use of these guns remained restricted because of the limited supply of shells and the field artillery was more or less powerless to reply to the Boer guns.

Miss Rose Lina Shappere, an Australian nurse, also arrived by one of the last trains. Nurse Shappere had already been through an eventful experience, having accompanied the commandos to the Natal border from Johannesburg at the start of the war. From being stationed at Standerton in the Transvaal with the Red Cross, she returned to Johannesburg, before going to Delagoa Bay by rail, thence to Durban by steamer. Nurse Shappere arrived in Ladysmith just as the first bombardment began. She became attached to the volunteer Military Hospital.

In an attempt to break the closing circle to the north just before the siege started on 2 November 1899 the British carried out a night attack against enemy positions, meeting with disaster at Pepworth Hill and Nicholson's Nek. More than 700 officers and men were captured in the course of these operations. A mountain battery and infantry reached a point several miles north of the town. The mules, newly broken into military work, stampeded in the darkness in broken country when the enemy opened fire. All the guns and munitions were lost. The troops built sangars on the top of a kopje. When daylight came they found themselves under fire which soon caused heavy losses. Without food or water and running short of ammunition they were forced to surrender.

An Australian gunner with the 10th Mountain Battery, Royal Artillery wrote to his mother in Melbourne from Pretoria on 16 November 1899: 'Just a few lines to let you know where I am, and what I am doing. I expect you received my letter sent from Ladysmith a few weeks ago, and I expect you know things have taken a great change since then. My battery were all taken prisoner by the Boers and sent to Pretoria. They have rigged up a

temporary prison on the racecourse. They are treating us very well indeed, much better than I expected.

'It was on 30 October about 7.30 p.m. We got orders to saddle up and march off about half past eight, right through the enemy's lines, and take up a position on a hill in the rear. The march was carried out in a satisfactory manner until we reached the foot of the hill when the mules stampeded. As the night was dark it was useless looking for them. We went up the hill without our guns, and were kept busy all night building sangars for the infantry. We held out until half an hour after noon on 31 October, when we were forced to surrender. I shall never forget those few hours as long as I live.

'It was awful to see our comrades shot down, and the groans of the wounded were terrible. I myself had two very narrow escapes, one bullet striking my sword, and the other entered the right sleeve of my jacket, half-way between the elbow and the shoulder, and came out on top of my shoulder, leaving a wound about two inches long and half an inch wide. It is very nearly well again. I will be glad when this war is over and we are released. Our pay goes on all the same while we are here, and I expect we will be here a few months yet.'

Meanwhile refugees in Ladysmith from the northern areas of Dundee, Charlestown and Newcastle began to pass south in a continuous stream of wagons. They were in full flight to Colenso, which in turn was evacuated on the evening of 2 November. On the same afternoon the telegraph lines were cut and all communication between Ladysmith and the south ceased.

Most of the townspeople stayed on with the 12,000 troops. The siege population included the garrison, the Natal Field Force, refugees, townspeople and natives. General Sir John French, with his Chief Staff Officer, Major Douglas Haig, having been ordered south, left on the last train. (Haig was to succeed French as British Commander-in-Chief on the Western Front in the 1914-18 War.) Near Pieter's Station the train was exposed to heavy sniper fire.

White retained the mounted troops but the main contribution of the horses during the siege lay in the provision of meat; when the animals were on the verge of starvation they were slaughtered for meat. A number were killed for rations and a good many boiled for soup every day; 10,000 horses and mules within the confines of the town were soon without corn and had to fall back on eating foliage. The presence of so many animals, together with the summer heat that often rose to over 100 degrees Fahrenheit in the shade, brought swarms of flies, contributing even more to the insanitary conditions of the place.

As the months passed by the number of fit horses became so few that after New Year's Day very few squadrons could have been made up in the

event of a flying column having to try and cut its way out. The 5th Dragoons went into Ladysmith with 518 horses and finished up with 73.

In the rainy season the khaki uniforms through contact with the Natal mud and by constant washing became light in colour. Karri Davies tried to overcome this by dyeing with Condyl's fluid, which transformed the appearance to a dirty yellow. When washed this deteriorated to a dirty pink. The dyeing process he also directed to the horses. All the conspicuous grey mounts were dyed in a khaki blend.

On the night of 7 December 1899 a storming party of 500 Natal Volunteers and 100 Imperial Light Horse attacked Gun Hill three miles east of the town, a kopje with rocky scrub-covered slopes. The sortie silenced a heavy Creusot gun known as 'Long Tom'. Karri Davies used a small hammer and the sighting rod of the gun to knock out the hinge pin of the breech block. The raiders also destroyed a howitzer and brought back a captured machine-gun. Under orders from Karri Davies eight men of the Imperial Light Horse carried 'Long Tom's' breech block, weighing 135 pounds, down the hill to the Imperial Light Horse camp. (For years afterwards it occupied a place on the table at any dinner function of the Imperial Light Horse. Karri Davies regarded it as his personal property. Some years before his death he presented it to General Smuts.) A similar successful night attack took place on a boulder-strewn slope on Surprise Hill, three miles north-west of the town.

During the first weeks of the siege football and cricket and polo were played to dispel the monotony — until the Boer gunners dropped eight shells in rapid succession on a field of polo players.

Surgeon-Major F. W. Caton Jones, originally from South Australia, served with an Imperial regiment. He distinguished himself by walking out under fire from a redoubt held by the 1st Battalion Liverpool Regiment to rescue an infantry officer hit in the leg by a shell. In heavy fire across open ground he managed to carry the wounded officer to the shelter of a rocky spur. Working behind cover Jones was able to stem the flow of blood with a tourniquet. But it was too late and Jones was left to return alone across the field of fire to the redoubt.

On the Boer side special trains from Pretoria brought the Boer women to the front to visit their menfolk and to enjoy the bombardment of the town. The burghers commonly held the opinion that the advantage in numbers and, in some ways, superior armament would soon cause the town to fall.

Among the besieged, dysentery and enteric fever became prevalent by the beginning of December. Between 2 November and the lifting of the siege on 28 February 1900 nearly 70 per cent of the military passed through the hospitals. The civilians suffered to the extent of 40 per cent. In January an average of 110 men a day were going into the hospitals. When the relief arrived more than 3,000 men were sick.

By agreement with General Joubert a non-combatants' camp and a hospital were established three miles south-east of the town, under the lee of Mount Umbulwana. To this neutral place, well within the range of Boer artillery and small arms fire, women and children, some men civilians and the sick and wounded soldiers were sent. One train a day went from the town to the hospital. From the Boer lines frequent visits were made to the camp to replenish medical and surgical supplies.

Christmas Day passed fairly uneventfully, except for a Christmas party arranged for the children. Every one of the 150 children received a gift from one of four Christmas trees, each tree bearing the name of an Empire country: Great Britain, South Africa, Canada and Australia.

In the early days of the siege before the defences were fully organised the town might have been taken by the 20,000 burghers in the encircling hills had they been prepared to accept the losses. In the New Year they did attempt to carry one strong position by storm.

From the beginning it was recognised that the three miles long ridge to the south of the town, with a low nek in the centre, must be defended at all costs. This ridge rising 300 feet above the plain was called Wagon Hill west of the Nek and Caesar's Camp east of it. Caesar's Camp at the point nearest Ladysmith virtually commanded the streets of the town. Once these heights were lost, further resistance would be pointless. At dawn on Saturday, 6 January 1900 the Boers attacked these positions with a wave of 2,000 men, followed by another 2,000 in support.

The direction of the defence fell to Colonel Ian Hamilton, later to command the Gallipoli operations, whose headquarters that night were in a gully at the north-east end of Caesar's Camp. Throughout a long hot summer's day the fight waged savagely with short range firing among the rocks, where every man crawled up as close as he could behind cover. British regulars and colonial volunteers fought alike with great courage to hold the rocky plateau in a battle lasting 16 hours.

On that day burghers led by Commandant C. J. De Villiers of Harrismith attacked British infantry holding well-chosen positions in a sustained way they never afterwards equalled. The Boers never showed finer courage. They succeeded in getting a footing on the point at Wagon Hill by 5 o'clock in the morning and were not dislodged before 4 o'clock that afternoon. On the narrow plateau they took sangars and fought in gun pits. More than once they were thrown out and driven back.

On the night of Friday, 5 January there had been unusual activity on Wagon Point, the western extremity of Wagon Hill, where a working party of 30 sappers and sailors under Lieutenant R. J. T. Digby Jones of the Royal Engineers were unloading and working until after midnight in preparation for the mounting of a 4.7-inch naval gun.

Corporal Arthur Dunn was in charge of a 'C' Squadron Imperial Light Horse picket on Wagon Point. He had with him Trooper Goddard and Trooper Jack Plunkett, a young lad from the Queensland town of Roma. At 2.30 a.m. Corporal Dunn became aware of movement in the darkness away below. While the Orange Free State burghers of the Harrismith commando were stealing up through the boulders and low hanging thorn bushes lining the steep slopes, the picket challenged. Receiving no reply the picket sounded the alarm by discharging their rifles down the slope in the direction of the approaching burghers.

About 80 troopers of the Imperial Light Horse met the first attack on the point at Wagon Hill. By weight of numbers the burghers succeeded in gaining a hold on the main summit near the western part of the hill. There they remained all day, defying every effort to dislodge them. As the uncertain light of dawn left the plateau, the morning sun clearly revealed men who had failed to take cover. The Boers, with their Mausers, proved deadly accurate marksmen.

In the heat of an African summer's day the men lay separated from the burghers by a no-man's-land in the form of an open grassy slope. The two lines of riflemen curved in closer on the flanks where each man sought protection among the scattered rocks. Every attempt by the soldiers to gain ground across this sector brought nothing but losses.

On Caesar's Camp the attack by Transvaal commandos began just over an hour after the alarm on Wagon Point. On reaching the crest the burghers met with a steady rate of fire from the rifles of the Manchester Regiment and the Natal Volunteers. They remained pinned down and never succeeded in pushing forward to the main plateau on the summit. On the far eastern point of the range a Boer storming party, outnumbered the Manchester defenders ten to one. Bitter fighting followed. At the end of the day only two survived at a post that had been held by 16 men. Only Private J. Pitts was unwounded. He held the post with Private R. Scott for 15 hours without food or water. Each was awarded the Victoria Cross. The Natal Mounted Rifles fought tenaciously all day from the cover of rocks and thorn bushes.

The assault on Caesar's Camp was eventually stopped by timely and well-directed artillery fire. Unable to retreat the burghers clung precariously against the slopes until nightfall.

Early in the morning Colonel Ian Hamilton had hurried over to Wagon Hill. From there his urgent telephone call to Sir George White brought reinforcements including three squadrons of Imperial Light Horse which went into action at 5 a.m. That the day was saved owed much to the speed by which reinforcements were rushed to the point most needed. The first alarm had been raised by the elaborate telephone system connecting all the outlying posts with headquarters in the town. Sir George White afterwards

said that it was the telephone system that had saved Ladysmith. A telephone and telegraph battalion arrived in Durban on 27 October with many miles of wire, ground cable and portable exchange equipment, all of which was sent by rail to Ladysmith on the same day.

The battle for Ladysmith continued without pause in the summer heat of 6 January. In the late afternoon a fierce storm broke over the battlefield, adding the turbulences of high wind and driving rain to the violence of the day. As the storm began to clear the ridges rang with renewed bursts of fire from the Mausers.

At 5 p.m. three companies of the 1st Battalion Devonshire Regiment waited on the northern slope below the crest on Wagon Hill, after having marched with every available man from the outskirts of Ladysmith at 4 p.m. They were fresh troops called up by Colonel Hamilton to make a final charge over the open ground across which all efforts to pass had failed.

With the easing of the storm the Devons, led by Colonel C. W. Park, with bayonets bare and glistening in the light of the closing day began a decisive charge across 130 yards of reasonably level open ground. The burghers met them by rising to their feet and emptying their magazines into the advancing lines. Firing to the end they made a last stand among the rocks before turning to disappear over the crest. The Devons left 70 dead and wounded in their wake.

From the close fighting among the rocks, Lieutenant J. E. I. Masterson ran back under heavy fire to direct the supporting fire of the Imperial Light Horse. For this gallant action in which he was wounded more than once, Masterson was awarded the Victoria Cross.

By 7 o'clock the last of the burghers were forced off the plateau. In trying to cross the spruit in the valley below many left floundering in the flooded waters were picked off by the soldiers from above.

Alone in possession of the plateau in the gathering darkness the exhausted defenders dropped down on the wet ground among the granite boulders and slept alongside the dead and the wounded. The relief force did not arrive until the end of February, but Ladysmith had been saved by the dramatic events of the day, at a cost of 500 men killed, wounded and missing.

Winston Churchill, who entered Ladysmith as a war correspondent when the siege was lifted, sent a telegram to the aged General Sir Ian Hamilton 41 years later. The occasion was the fall of Bardia in the North African campaign in January 1941. 'I am thinking of you and Wagon Hill, when another 6 January brings news of a fine feat of arms,' he said.²

In a speech at a civic reception at Cape Town when he was returning to England, Sir George White said: 'I have been a soldier of the Queen for nearly 50 years—and I can confidently say here that I never before had the

² General Sir Ian Hamilton, *Listening for the Drums* (1944).

honour to command so fine a fighting force as the Imperial Light Horse.³

Colonel Hamilton reported that the Imperial Light Horse formed 'the backbone of the defence' in the long fight on Wagon Hill. Lord Roberts in a despatch to the War Office from Bloemfontein on 28 March 1900 said: 'It is gratifying to observe that in his account of what occurred on 6 January, when the enemy's attack on Ladysmith was gallantly repulsed, a Colonial Corps, the Imperial Light Horse, has been singled out by Sir George White for special commendation.'⁴

On Wagon Point soon after midday a detachment of Harrismith burghers led by Field-Cornets Jacob De Villiers and Zacharias De Jager figured in a determined attack that swept the burghers' thrust right up to the wall of the gun-pit under construction for the naval gun. The defence rested on a handful of men. In the shooting at point blank range Lieutenant Digby Jones shot Field-Cornet De Villiers, who fell near the wall of the gun-pit. Colonel Ian Hamilton, firing from the sand-bagged parapet, emptied his revolver into the burghers. Digby Jones, who was killed later in the day, was awarded the Victoria Cross. Trooper Herman Albrecht, of the Imperial Light Horse, fell after shooting two other Boer leaders dead and he also was awarded the VC.

In the struggle on the main Wagon Hill plateau the manager of the Village Reef Mine on the Rand, Major D. E. Doveton of the Imperial Light Horse, received a mortal wound. Lieutenant J. E. Pakeman, a brother of the editor of the Johannesburg *Transvaal Leader*, also fell.

Commandant C. J. De Villiers had taken part in the storming of Majuba Hill in 1881. Colonel Ian Hamilton also fought at Majuba.

Donald Macdonald, the Australian war correspondent, was one of the journalists who decided not to leave Ladysmith before the town became completely encircled. 'Personally,' he wrote, 'I elected to sit tight and see what may be the great struggle of the war. We shall all be worried and harassed, but the end I think will not be the Pretoria gaol.'

Among the Australians who fought in the ranks on that memorable day on Wagon Hill was a young trooper from New South Wales named Fitzgerald. He wrote informing his brother in Bourke that he was 'locked up in Ladysmith'.

Trooper Hector Lindsay, who enlisted in the Imperial Light Horse at Pietermaritzburg on 23 September, wrote to his brother in Victoria: 'Our last fight, and the worst that has ever been known for many a long day, was at Wagon Hill in the defence of Ladysmith, where our losses were 115 killed and 92 wounded, and we were fighting for 17 hours without food or water, and it was raining in torrents. I lay in one laager on my stomach and I made

good use of my rifle, a magazine type and a beauty, holding ten cartridges. I fired exactly 372 rounds. The Boers on one occasion were within 10 to 15 yards of us and fell like pears.' Karri Davies, whose dyed breeches tended to make him rather conspicuous to the Boer marksmen on Wagon Hill point, was shot through the buttocks so that he bled profusely. 'Hurry up and stop the bleeding,' he shouted to the stretcher bearers, 'I want to go back.' And in no time he did so.

Two Australian doctors serving with the Natal Volunteer Medical Staff were conspicuous under fire throughout the day. Surgeon Robert Buntine arrived in South Africa from Melbourne in 1893 as ship's surgeon. For two years he was surgeon superintendent of the Pietermaritzburg hospital before taking up his own medical practice in that town. Athletic and tanned and fit, Buntine looked more like a lighthorseman than a doctor especially when mounted on one of the dyed-in-the-hide horses. He had been mentioned in despatches after the fight at Rietfontein Farm for gallantry and devotion to the wounded under fire.

Donald Macdonald wrote: 'The more I see of our young Australian doctors the greater my pride in my countrymen.' In the hottest part of the fight at Wagon Hill, Dr Buntine, although exposed to a cross fire, sat down calmly and performed a delicate operation upon a wounded officer who had been shot in the throat. His conduct everywhere was the subject of high praise.

Dr Rupert Hornabrook (mentioned earlier) came from Adelaide. After completing his studies in England, he was sent by the British Government to investigate the plague in India. As a result of his experiences in that country, he was sent to South Africa where the spread of the disease was feared.

Early in the morning the only surgeons in the field were Dr Hornabrook and Dr Wood of the Manchester Regiment. Hornabrook made his way up the ridges, working his way round by dressing one wounded man after another. Within a few yards he attended a Natal Mounted Rifleman and then went down the slope to where a Gordon Highlander lay in a hail of fire. He came in wounded in the hip and on the shoulder, both slight wounds which left his clothes matted with blood. As a result when the battle was over Hornabrook was detached from the front line and sent to the civilian hospital at Intombi, though very much against his will.

After 6 January the sniping and shelling continued but further casualties were few before the lifting of the siege, although the death-roll from disease mounted.

Nurse Shappere wrote to her sister in Melbourne from the military hospital: 'Thank God the siege is over. Ladysmith is relieved. Oh, how we all looked forward to it, praying day and night, for at the last the scenes

³ The *Cape Argus*, 17 Mar 1900, and the *Advertiser*, Adelaide, 19 Apr 1900.

⁴ Bennett Burleigh, *The Natal Campaign*.

were heart-breaking, and I am sure if it had not come when it did, a great number of us would have died. I was just on my last legs; so ill I had not taken any food for days.

'Our daily rations the last fortnight or three weeks, consisted of one-sixth ounce of tea, 1 oz sugar, $\frac{1}{2}$ lb of bread made from mealies (not edible) or $1\frac{1}{2}$ lb of bully beef. Sometimes in place of tea we got awful coffee, and at 7 p.m. a cup of horseflesh soup and it was generally bad. In Ladysmith they had it made into sausages, but by the time we got it, it was high. Breakfast 7.30 black tea and bread. Dinner 1 p.m. meat and a little rice, 4 p.m. black tea, and at 7 p.m. soup. Imagine working in our wards like a Trojan on that diet, often until 10 p.m. at night.

'It was an awful Christmas Day, one never to be forgotten; blazing hot and patients dying all round us, and very little comfort could we give them. If I never would be nursing again, I can say that I was able to give some relief to our poor Tommies. They rarely murmured, and their hardships were great, many of them sometimes lying for days in the hot sun and then in the rain; their clothes were not off their back for three weeks. Do you wonder they were covered with vermin? And then when we got them we had no shirts to put on them. The sisters suffered in the same way. I have given all my clothes that I wore in the siege to the Kaffirs.'

Nurse Shappere received a mention in despatches from Cape Town by Sir George White for devotion to duty and especially good services.

CHAPTER 5

The Australian contingents settle in

General Sir Redvers Buller left England before a shot had been fired in the war. In a number of campaigns extending over a long and varied career he had established a reputation for distinguished courage and vigour in the face of the enemy. For a gallant action in the Zulu War in 1879 he received the Victoria Cross. In 1898 General Buller was appointed to the high post of General Officer Commanding at Aldershot. From the post at Aldershot he was summoned to conduct the war against the Boer Republics. Nevertheless at the time of his appointment as Commander-in-Chief in South Africa his ability as a strategist had yet to be demonstrated; until then he had never held an independent command over a large body of troops.

By the time of the arrival of General Buller in Cape Town on 31 October 1899 an army corps of 50,000 men was on the high seas or in the process of embarking. The immediate problem was to drive the enemy from the British territories. All along the line from the Colenso plain in the east to the Modder River near Kimberley in the west, the enemy waited in well-chosen positions. They were determined to hold them.

The army suffered not only from an inferiority in numbers but from the lack of mounted infantry, a shortage of transport and the knowledge that

the British guns were outraged by those of the enemy. In addition officers had to contend with the handicap of inadequate and often inaccurate military maps. For his plan of campaign Buller finally decided to divide his army corps into several columns. The Natal command with the largest force he took over himself, its first objective being the relief of Ladysmith.

The troops designated for Natal re-embarked from Cape Town for Durban immediately on arrival. Buller sent a strong column of infantry to the west under Lieut-General Lord Methuen to relieve Kimberley. In the centre Major-General Sir William Gatacre with a small force had the task of checking a possible thrust deep into the Cape Colony. During November and December these operations continued independently without any central control nor with overwhelming strength at any single point. By 20 November 27,000 men of the Army Corps had disembarked. After the 6,000 mile voyage the troops moved rapidly to the front.

Methuen's force of 10,000 men, of whom only 900 were mounted, entrained on the 600 mile single-track railway to Orange River station just 75 miles south of Kimberley. His mounted force consisted of the 9th Lancers and a detachment of mounted infantry. Twenty-eight New South Wales Lancers and their leader, Lieutenant S. F. Osborne, part of the squadron recently arrived at Cape Town from Aldershot, were also attached.

After 12 days occupied in getting remounts and fitting out at Stellenbosch camp outside Cape Town the complete New South Wales Lancer Squadron entrained as far as De Aar, an important railway junction about 60 miles south of Orange River station. In a letter sent from there, Corporal F. I. Kilpatrick wrote: 'We just heard news of 28 of us going to Orange River station to fill the vacancies of the 9th Lancers.' The remainder of the Lancer Squadron joined General French on the central Cape Colony front around Colesberg.

A small unit of mounted scouts, led by Major M. F. Rimington of the 6th Dragoon Guards, was also attached to the 9th Lancers. This special corps of scouts was composed of African Colonials and Uitlanders. They wore a distinguishing band of tiger skin round their hats. Being as much at home on the veldt as the Boers themselves, they were able to travel lightly by either day or night. Some of the men spoke Afrikaans fluently. By the nature of their probing patrols the Boers soon found them a force to be reckoned with. The fact that they were Colonials made them especially disliked by the burghers.

After a week at Orange River the force advanced towards Kimberley using the railway. Scouting ahead, Lancers located the Boers near the Belmont siding, 19 miles south of Kimberley. They waited with a strength of about 2,000 on a range of kopjes to the east of the line. The clearing of the kopjes and the defeat of the entrenched enemy became Methuen's first

objective. At daylight on 22 November his force marched from Witteputs and from early morning began to occupy Thomas's Farm, 2 miles south of Belmont station on the western side of the railway. Here the New South Wales Lancers, reconnoitring, came under fire for the first time. From a kopje near Thomas's Farm, Methuen surveyed the Boer position. He decided to attack at the first light of dawn.

In the darkness at 2 a.m. the troops marched towards the Boer position across the open veldt. Beyond the railway siding the burghers with five guns held a succession of rocky kopjes and ridges rising from 100 to 250 feet above the veldt. Near the railway the soldiers came under fire from burghers in well placed sangars on the crests. On rocky slopes and in small gullies the fighting fanned out over an area of about 5 square miles.

By 7.30 that morning the battle of Belmont ended with the burghers in full retreat. Mounted on swift moving ponies the main Boer force made off across the veldt. The lack of sufficient mounted men denied Methuen a decisive victory, for without them there could be no effective pursuit. The battle on the Belmont kopjes exacted a toll of 250 men killed and wounded. The brunt of the fighting fell on the Grenadier Guards, with casualties of 22 killed and 114 wounded.

Private Henry Schultze, from St Arnaud in Victoria, fought with the Grenadier Guards. He was 24 years of age and died of his wounds. Schultze was one of the biggest men in the British Army; his size and bearing often gained him a position at Royal functions. He served for three years in England and Gibraltar with the regiment. He landed at the Cape on 15 November and at once entrained for the front. A plaque was erected in the school at St Arnaud to his memory. Schultze may well have been the first Australian to fall in the war.

Major V. C. M. Sellheim, a member of the Queensland Permanent Forces, was in England on a training course when the war began. The Queensland Government arranged for Major Sellheim to serve with the Imperial Forces as a Special Service Officer. At Belmont he was attached to the Northampton Regiment. On 13 January 1900 he transferred to the 1st Queensland Mounted Infantry and took part in the relief of Kimberley.

Major Sellheim wrote from Belmont: '24 November, Belmont battlefield. I have had my first bleeding and am thankful to say that I have come out safe and sound. You will have heard long before this of the victory we gained. I am writing these few lines on a pad supported on a water-bottle.

'I was in the thick of it all day with the Northamptons to whom I am attached at present. It was purely an infantry affair, and we were for about five hours under fire. As soon as we drove the Boers from one kopje, they took up a position on another in the rear. Finally there was only one open plain for them, and they bolted across it as fast as they could go. Being very

short of cavalry, we did not reap as much from our victory as we ought to have done.

'Our casualties were 231. I saw some ghastly sights, and felt at the time that war was a very horrible business. The hottest corner I was in was a valley between two kopjes. It rained a hail of lead there, and we had to take what shelter we could get, while the artillery fired over our heads and shelled the Boers out. I got cover behind a small ant bed, while the bullets were humming overhead, and kicking up the red dust all around.

'Our infantry are wonderful, and had a very difficult task to storm these kopjes covered with boulders. But I never saw them hesitate. Some of our officers (Northamptons) were severely wounded and some had narrow escapes. Colonel [J. J.] Byron is with the Mounted Infantry and is not wounded. We continue the advance to Kimberley today.'

Victor Sellheim, later Major-General, died on 25 January 1928 while serving as Administrator of Norfolk Island. During the 1914-18 war he was Commandant of Administrative Headquarters of the Australian Imperial Forces in Egypt and London. In 1914 and from 1917 to 1924 he was Adjutant-General of the Australian Forces.

Two days after this Belmont action, scouts reported the enemy seen on a range of kopjes 11 miles further along the road to Kimberley. They were estimated to be about 400 strong on a low range running for a mile and a half to the east of the railway near the siding at Graspan.

The engagement at Graspan became noteworthy because a party of 245 blue-jackets and marines from the naval gun crews were chosen to march with the infantry. The navy men were nominated to assault the kopje regarded as the key to turning the enemy position. For this engagement the Guards were rested. The 9th Lancers, with the detachment of 28 New South Wales Lancers were on the right flank.

The kopje on the eastern point of the range rose steeply for 200 feet facing south above the plain. The weakest point faced west towards the railway, where the Boers positioned two guns to support the riflemen. Although the reported enemy strength of 400 may have been correct when the reconnaissance took place, by the morning of the 25th 2,000 burghers with five guns were distributed along the front.

With the artillery pounding the range and the Boer gunners responding, the soldiers left camp at dawn marching ahead for three and a half hours. The Naval Brigade led the way, having had no breakfast other than a biscuit or two or a piece of bread left over from the evening meal. Although they led in the march across the veldt, the rank and file of the naval lads had no particular knowledge of how the attack was planned to develop.

The troops faced a scorching fire as they approached from the open veldt to make a frontal attack on the kopje. Supported splendidly by the gunners

who continuously pounded the crests with shells, the sailors advanced to the foot of the range.

In his despatch General Methuen wrote: 'The Naval Brigade attacked in too close a formation.' Before the base of the kopje was reached to give some cover the Boers concealed in sangars poured in such a deadly fire at a 600-yard range that nearly half the sailors were hit. Of the 16 officers, wearing swords and polished belts, all but three were either killed or wounded. The sailors took cover as best they could, lying pressed against the red veldt, behind an ant hill, or a tuft of grass. In this precarious position in the full morning heat they quenched their thirst from the water-bottles. Not wanting in determination they waited, gathering strength. Meanwhile infantry battalions demonstrated along the range to the left.

In response to the bugler's call to charge the sailors rushed forward with the bullets coming thickly. The momentum of the charge took them to the foot of the kopje and some cover. With the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry in close support pouring volleys from the flanks into the kopje, the sailors clambered up the rocky slope with bayonets fixed. The Boer fire did not relax until the men were within 25 yards of the top. Then the burghers gave ground moving in good order to where their ponies waited saddled on the far side. Before the men with the bayonets could get within striking distance of them the Boers had mounted and ridden away. The mounted British troops placed ready on the flanks failed to cut off the retreat. The burghers got clear with wagons and guns. They had no fear of troopers weak in numbers and with mounts the worse for wear. This was evident when some burghers turned back to face the Lancers. The New South Wales Lancers were almost cut off. Trooper Peter McDonald wrote: 'Our second engagement was at Graspan and was very severe. The Naval Brigade lost heavily, and we with a few Northumberland men were nearly cut off. We had a dangerous go for it. The Major of Mounted Infantry to which we were attached, said to us: "Come boys, let us die together." So we took up a firm stand, but there was just a handful of us.

'We ran up on the brow of a small hill, and sent our horses away under Henry Robson to a place of cover. We fired on the Boers who were trying to cut us off, dropping several of them from their saddles. Of course we held a good position or we would never have stood. However we turned about 500 Boers and never lost a man.'

One New South Wales Lancer, Trooper J. J. Byrne from Parramatta, was missing at the end of the day. He had been detailed to stand guard over a prisoner found in a farmhouse on the Boer line of retreat. When it was getting dark Byrne set out to ride to the British camp with the prisoner. Held up by the Mauser fire on the way and caught in the failing light he decided to spend the night on the open veldt, keeping the prisoner under

guard. First thing in the morning Byrne rode into camp with the Boer and accompanied by two stragglers from the 9th Lancers. At 18 years of age Byrne—known to his mates as 'Burnisher'—was the youngest of the 'Fighting 28' detachment.

Methuen expressed his disappointment at the failure to seal the victories won by the infantry in successive engagements by dismissing the commander of the 9th Lancers, Lieut-Colonel B. Gough. However, the blame really lay with those responsible for not providing the column with the numbers of mounted troops necessary for reconnaissance and pursuit against such a mobile foe. England had sent the men quickly enough but had yet to provide the type of mounted riflemen needed to combat the fleet Boer on his own terrain.

Captain J. M. Antill, commanding the New South Wales Mounted Rifles, wrote on 15 December 1899: 'They are sadly in want of mounted troops, and are sighing for mounted rifles. We could do with a few more thousand. They have lots of artillery but the difficulty in every fight is that the enemy get away without our being able to outflank them, being too weak in the mounted rifles arm. I have worked up my men very well. Pity there is not 1,000 of them.'

Mr J. Berry, of Sydney, who served with Rimington's Scouts at Belmont and Graspan, wrote: 'We may well be proud that we are British. If only you could see an army of our men marching steadily up to the enemy in the face of a hail of shot and shell you would be proud; to see them moving resolutely forward with their comrades dropping on each side of them, would make your heart bound again. Of course the sad part is after the battle when one looks upon the poor fellows lying dead, knowing that only a few hours before they were in full vigour of health.'

The British casualties at Graspan were 17 killed and 168 wounded. Among those who fell near the top of the kopje was a young midshipman, C. Huddart, from Ballarat. Early in the charge Huddart received a wound on the arm. He continued to lead moving from cover to cover before being shot again. Even then he tried to struggle on until he fell for the last time on the stony upper slopes of the kopje.

Midshipman Huddart was attached to HMS *Doris*, the flagship of the South Africa Station. He entered the Royal Navy in 1897, and was in his 19th year when he was killed. The Australian newspapers reported that Queen Victoria sent a message to his family, and requested that his photo be sent to her. At St James's Palace King Edward VII later presented the Conspicuous Service Cross to his mother.

Without coming under pressure to any degree, the mobile Boers moved back to take up a new position across the line of march of the army. Concentrating at Modder River station, half a mile north of the Riet River,

they destroyed the iron railway bridge spanning the river, known as Modder River bridge because of its proximity to the Modder River station. The action that took place here became known as the Battle of the Modder River, rather a misnomer because the river spanned by the Modder River bridge is actually the Riet. It was on the banks of the Riet River that the Boers decided to make a stand.

At a point almost immediately above the bridge the Modder River merges with the Riet, after having followed a similar but more northerly pattern on a westerly passage across the veldt. Known as the 'Twee Rivier', the spit of land formed by the angle of the converging rivers was something of an oasis. Shaded by tall trees, it was a favourite picnic spot for the people of Kimberley.

When General Cronje arrived from Mafeking, he set up his headquarters in the Island Hotel on the Twee Rivier. He readily agreed to the plan of battle put forward by General De la Rey. The river in its course from east to west had scoured deep banks. At Modder River Bridge the surface flowed 30 feet below the level of the bare and flat countryside and all along the course the banks were bordered by willows and small shrubs.

In the Twee Rivier and as far as the village of Rosemead west of the bridge every vantage point was taken by skilled marksmen. Some had small platforms in the trees. Along the southern bank of the Riet the burghers dug and prepared trenches guided by German officers. By this means 4,000 riflemen waited concealed, about half the strength of Methuen's approaching columns. They looked over open river flats, sometimes used as a racecourse. The flats gave way to a clean open slope receding towards the river, the whole aspect making a perfect field of fire.

On 27 November British patrols reported Boers concentrated near the bridgehead on the northern bank. Another report to the effect that the enemy was not strong persuaded Methuen to persist with his own notion that the burghers did not intend to make a stand so soon. He expected little more than a rearguard action.

In the early hours of 28 November the loyal station master at Modder River managed to get a message through by a native runner that the Boers were in strength on the river bank near the bridge. He advised that a drift 2 miles downstream was not strongly held. Even so Methuen retained his belief that no strong resistance was planned by the enemy along the line of the Riet near the bridge.

At 4.30 a.m. on 28 November British infantry screened by mounted troops left camp marching to the river, the objective being the immediate right and left flanks of the bridge. Methuen had information that the river was fordable at most places. Once across the river, the troops from both flanks were to converge before breakfasting at Modder River station.

Scouts moving well ahead of the column quickly reported the bridge strongly held when they drew heavy fire at 1,500 yards. No change occurred in the plan of battle as the infantry advanced over open country in extended lines. Veering too far to the right Methuen swung them back to the left towards the bridge. As the village and the bridge came into view not a Boer could be seen along the whole line of the river marked by the fringe of trees. Surveying the scene before him the General pointed out to his staff a house on the far side that he had decided on for his headquarters. The staff discussed freely as they rode on the possibility that the enemy may have already evacuated. Meanwhile the marching infantry columns moved steadily forward in the calm of a crisp morning.

At 6 a.m. from a range of 1,200 yards the peace of the morning was shattered. Suddenly from the whole river front came a burst of rifle fire so thick that every man instinctively flattened himself as close as he could to the ground. If the burghers had withheld the fire a few minutes longer the result must have been crippling. As matters were the men could do little on the open plain extending between them and the river beyond firing in the general direction of the still invisible enemy whenever they could.

On the right flank the Coldstream Guards by crawling across the flat ground and then advancing by quick rushes managed to get within 800 yards of the river opposite the racecourse. From this short range further advance became impossible. On the extreme right the Guards trying to outflank the Boer fire unexpectedly met the Riet River running north and south. Methuen's miscalculations were due to his ignorance of the strength and intentions of the enemy, increased by the poor quality of the maps at his disposal. He relied on a map hurriedly drawn up by a Royal Engineer just before the beginning of the war. The map and some of the information given in the text were inaccurate. The Riet in the course of its westerly progress flowed for four miles north and south on a line parallel to the British line of march. This variation did not appear on the staff map where the river upstream from the bridge was shown running due east.

Baulked in the effort to move away to the right by the unexpected presence of the arm of the river the Guards searched for a suitable ford to cross. Ironically enough the existence of Bosman's Drift on this stretch of the river remained unknown throughout the day. The fact that the army was unaware of the opportunity offered by the existence of Bosman's Drift materially affected the progress of the battle. The drift offered the infantry a ford which once crossed in strength would have taken them into the Twee Rivier in the rear of the Boer trenches.

Colonel A. E. Codrington with Major Sellheim and 12 men from the Coldstream Guards attempted to find a crossing. By wading and swimming up to the chin with rifle and all accoutrements they succeeded in reaching

the far bank. Coming under fire they withdrew. All returned safely although several men narrowly escaped drowning. The idea of crossing in strength in that place was given up as impossible. Such was the confusion geographically on the part of the British that Victor Sellheim and the Coldstreams believed they had swum the Modder River.

On the morning of 28 November Sellheim was attached to the Northampton Regiment guarding the baggage in the rear. Attracted by the sound of firing he walked up to the front line only to find himself caught in the field of fire. Lying flat on the veldt Sellheim found that he had stumbled into the prone ranks of the Coldstream Guards. In this way he managed to join the party about to attempt the river crossing. Sellheim later wrote: 'When I finally reached the bank, and as I lay exhausted, some of the enemy commenced sniping at me and I crawled to what shelter I could find. When I recovered I had to get across an open plain to good shelter, which I did at a run with a stray bullet or two kicking up the red dust around.'

Throughout the day the guns shelled the Boer trenches and beyond to the Twee Rivier—the naval guns from 3,000 yards and the field artillery from 1,700 yards. One six-gun battery of the 75th Royal Field Artillery advanced to within 1,200 yards well inside hard hitting range from the trenches. By this means the gunners kept down the rate of enemy fire although among the burghers the casualties were not very heavy.

Unable to either advance or retreat the infantry remained grounded sheltering at best behind an ant hill or a small bush. Fully exposed to the heat of the sun in a temperature that rose to 108 degrees Fahrenheit, they also received the unwelcome attentions of sticking flies and swarming ants. The want of water as the water-bottles became empty was even worse than the lack of food. No man lying in the open was out of rifle range so any movement drew a hail of bullets from an enemy who kept out of sight. Neither ambulance wagons, stretcher bearers, nor the water carts, could move with safety in the zone of fire so there was little relief until nightfall when the ordeal had lasted 10 hours.

Private F. Stakes, an Australian who fought that day with the 2nd Yorkshire Light Infantry, told of his experiences in a letter to his mother at Essendon, sent from the hospital at Wynberg where he lay severely wounded. 'At the last fight at Modder River we had nothing to eat for two days. Some of us were dying for water. A water cart came in sight and some dozen [men] rushed forward for a drink, right in the midst of the heavy fire. A shell was fired at them, killing the driver, and most of the men and smashing the cart to pieces.'

On the British left the 9th Brigade veering well to the western side of the bridge was stopped on the march in a similar manner to the rest of the field except that they were also subjected to enfilading fire from the near side of

the river, coming from a farmhouse and a kraal marking the right of the Boer flank. Before long, by making use of a donga running down to the bank of the river, the soldiers succeeded in getting behind the Boer detachments, placing their line of retreat in jeopardy. A strong frontal attack forced the burghers to abandon the posts and hurry across the river.

The soldiers followed quickly either by a dam or a drift covered earlier by the outpost at the farmhouse. Some managed to wade across the open river. With artillery support trained on Rosemead village the turning point was near. By 2 o'clock the soldiers occupied the village. Owing to the absence of additional infantry support the Boer line did not fold up as it might have done. During the afternoon Methuen received a flesh wound in the thigh. For this reason vital time was lost in getting reinforcements up. The day ended with the Boers still entrenched along the Twee Rivier. That night the infantry camped in Rosemead.

For the troops spread over the plain the night brought the long awaited relief from the strain of a perilous day. The burghers on the other hand used the cover of darkness to retreat with all their guns. In the words of Victor Sellheim: 'As soon as darkness fell the enemy bolted.'

In the morning the entire army crossed the river unopposed. The victory in the battle fought largely because Methuen did not have under his command the necessary mounted troops at Belmont and Graspan cost the British 70 killed and 410 wounded.

The New South Wales Lancers acting in the role of escort to the artillery were on the field all day. Trooper G. J. Stratford wrote: 'We started out early. At 5 o'clock the advance guard met the enemy. All day the battle raged until 7 o'clock that night. It was the biggest fight that has yet taken place. The men were hard at it for 13 hours under heavy fire. We could not shift the Boers who held a strong position, but they left during the night. Our loss was a heavy one. We had a rough time of it having nothing to eat for 15 hours, and could not get a drink for nearly 30 hours. One of our Lancers had a horse shot from under him. It makes you feel a bit queer to hear the bullets whistling past your ears. So far I cannot estimate our loss, but some of the British are lying on the field yet. The General says he never saw better work done, and was highly pleased that the troops carried the position at the Modder River, for that was one of the best positions occupied by the Boers. We are resting here for a week before proceeding towards Kimberley. We have to wait for the railway bridge to be repaired.'

Having fought three battles within a period of six days Methuen's army established itself in the Twee Rivier area. Perhaps Trooper Thomas Pestell, a New South Wales Lancer, expressed the general opinion of the soldier in the ranks when he wrote: 'I have been through the Belmont battle, the Graspan battle, and the Modder River battle. The Boers will not come out

and fight, they must be behind a hill or a rock, or something of that kind. The British have driven them out of every place they have been in yet. The last place they had trenches dug for miles, and they were lying in them, and they even ran from that position.'

Mounted patrols joined by the New South Wales Lancers scouted daily, frequently coming under fire as they ranged north for six miles, sometimes skirting the Magersfontein Range. At the same time the Royal Engineers were busy constructing a slight rail deviation and a low-level bridge, as Methuen would not move until the railway link over the river was secured to ensure a passage for his transport.

Reinforcements from the south raised the force up to 15,000. Along the railway came supplies, guns and ammunition and a balloon section. Meanwhile Methuen recovered from his wound and the army was ready to advance. Nor were the Boers idle. Cronje at first planned to make a stand between the Magersfontein Range and Kimberley. On second thoughts he accepted the opinion of General De la Rey by deciding to fortify Magersfontein Range, about 15 miles south of Kimberley.

De la Rey had selected a position well east of the railway but still within good marching distance of it at the point where the southernmost end of Magersfontein emerged from the veldt to a height of 200 feet before sweeping in a north-westerly direction across the British line of advance. From the southern bluff of Magersfontein there was a gap of two-thirds of a mile before the commencement of a series of scrub-covered folds in the ground that never rose more than 60 feet in height at any point and extended south to within a mile of the Modder River.

With his commando increased to about 8,000 Cronje built sangars and rifle pits on the heights of Magersfontein, distributing his main strength near the Bluff where the southern end of the range sloped into the veldt. Near the base of the heights, at De la Rey's suggestion, narrow trenches were dug to a depth of three or four feet, extending in broken lines about 200 yards into the veldt beyond the base of the kopje. With the extensions the Boer trench line covered about 1,000 yards of ground.

The extended trenches protected riflemen looking out over several miles of open ground in the direction of the Modder River. Camouflaged with pieces of Karoo bush and rocks the trenches were barely visible 100 yards away and the British never knew until too late that they continued the defence lines on the kopje into the flat veldt. Whereas British patrols had so recently ranged over Magersfontein, it was now so well defended that scouts could not approach closer than a mile. Methuen lacked detailed knowledge of the Boer position. His captive balloon made no ascent before the battle otherwise the hidden trenches must have been discovered. Some of the colonials in Rimington's Scouts spoke Afrikaans fluently and were

as adept in knowledge of the veldt as the Boers, but no attempt was made to infiltrate the Boer lines.

Methuen's movements were still curtailed by a lack of supply transport away from the railway and the shortage of mounted troops. Unaware of where the weight of the Boer position rested and not knowing of the relative enemy weakness along the length of the low folds from south of Magersfontein to a point almost on the river, Methuen decided to force a passage through the gap lying between the Bluff and the beginning of the line of folds. The effect should have been to split the Boer force in two but De la Rey had anticipated the plan. The trenches continued on across this gap and provided a death trap to the unsuspecting attackers.

On Sunday afternoon 10 December the Black Watch with mounted escorts paraded in extended order before the enemy lines. The Highlanders withdrew without succeeding in drawing fire. The manoeuvre was followed by an artillery barrage. For the next hour and a half the heights were pulverised by the weight of metal from the great naval gun supported by howitzers and three batteries of the Royal Field Artillery. The 9th Lancers and the New South Wales Lancers provided escorts for the gunners.

At the height of the bombardment the burghers retired to the rear of the kopjes in comparative safety. When the batteries withdrew from the field in drizzling rain in the late afternoon the burghers returned to the sangars on the kopje and to the trenches below. With morale still high and unaffected by the shelling they waited for the frontal attack that they knew was now imminent, for the events of the afternoon had vindicated the correctness of De la Rey's decision. The anticipated area against which the infantry attack would be directed was confirmed.

Meanwhile the withdrawn British troops bivouacked on the open veldt for the night. Lieut-Colonel J. J. Byron, a Queensland officer of the Royal Australian Artillery serving as a Special Service Officer, wrote: 'All the troops bivouacked on the ground, and a cheerless night it was, as it rained heavily most of the time. We had only a blanket each, but I managed to bring my little waterproof cape, and spreading my blanket on a low bush lay down on it, and with the cape over me managed very well, as the bush kept me a few inches off the wet ground.'

Lord Methuen chose the Highland Brigade, under the well-loved Major-General A. J. ('Andy') Wauchope, to launch the assault against the Bluff at daybreak on 11 December with support from all guns. The enemy on the low line of folds on the right were to be contained by the Guards Brigade, leaving the open ground between where the folds ended and the Modder River to be patrolled by the 9th Lancers. At the same time a demonstration was to take place forward, along the line of the railway.

The march of the Highland Brigade began soon after midnight on a very wet and dark night. Most of the marchers were going to their first fight. Soon after the soldiers left the camping place the rain became heavier and was followed by a fierce thunderstorm. The rain continued until daybreak.

The brigade of 4,000 men moved slowly in mass, several battalions using guide ropes to retain formation. They were led to the point of assault with unerring accuracy by compass bearings taken by Major G. E. Benson. Necessarily slow over a two and a half mile march in intense darkness the troops also had to contend with scattered patches of thick thorn bush and rocky outcrops of ironstone that affected the compasses, making progress and the keeping of formation difficult.

The brigade orders were to extend just before daybreak. The assault was to begin with the first light of dawn in widely extended order. When Benson judged the kopje to be close he suggested the time had come for spreading out from column into line but Wauchope kept the brigade marching for another five minutes before giving the order to extend. The two leading battalions were in the act of deploying and within a few minutes more the whole brigade, having completed the movement, would have been in a position to attack. Quite suddenly from the gloom ahead the flashes from thousands of rifle muzzles illuminated the thin dawn light and a heavy fire poured into the close ranks of the Highlanders.

In the moments of shock and confusion that followed a variety of orders were given. Some fixed bayonets, and lay down ready for the charge. Others scampered back to a low line of bushes after a voice with or without authority called out: 'Retire.' About half the brigade remained at the foremost point of advance. There they lay only 400 yards from the enemy in the dawn light. Some gallantly charged forward towards the trenches but half fell as soon as they moved. Most of the officers in the forward battalions were killed, including Major-General Wauchope.

Several individual parties from the Black Watch and the Seaforth Highlanders succeeded in working around to the right beyond the Boer entrenchments at the base of the Bluff into the gap where more Boers awaited them. Veering left they headed for the reverse side of the Bluff. Some actually began to climb the kopje before they were discovered and shot. A few survivors were completely cut off and taken prisoner.

Small groups of the Black Watch and the Seaforths in the front line managed to approach within 250 yards of the hidden trenches; the foremost got so close that retreat was impossible. They stayed in the position for 14 hours unable to advance or retire as the slightest movement brought fire from the trenches. The ordeal was made worse by the occasional shell from their own guns dropping short.

By 6 a.m. the brigade lay scattered in groups over a front of almost a mile and a half, a few hundred yards in front of the trenches. Only the efforts of the artillery in keeping down the Boer rate of fire enabled the Highlanders to hang on. Whereas earlier the men were soaking wet they now suffered from the melting heat of the African sun. Their khaki aprons left exposed pale skin, in particular the bare backs of their knees, so that sunburn and blisters added to the discomforts the men had to suffer.

The field artillery moved up to give the grounded men close support. 'G' Battery of the Royal Horse Artillery with a mounted escort of the 12th Lancers and some mounted infantry, to which the New South Wales Lancers were then attached, advanced to within a range of 1,400 yards of the scrubby folds and 2,000 yards of the Boer trenches. Taking advantage of the reverse slope of a hillock they stayed giving strong support all day, with the loss of only four men wounded. The battery assailed the trenches and the line of folds and bushy ridges with an incessant and effective fire using a greater amount of ammunition than any other battery on a single day in the war. Though the last survivors of the most advanced attacking force retired at dusk 'G' Battery and its Lancer escort remained on the job throughout the night and into the following morning.

Mounted on slight but wiry Cape ponies and with slouch hats and plumes, the New South Welshmen appeared vastly different to the British in khaki and regulation helmets. The colonials stayed that night in the field beside the guns. The next day after 24 hours in the field they were almost the last to retire.

Right through the morning of the battle men, either wounded or overcome with thirst as the water-bottles emptied, crawled back in small parties. One officer became so fascinated by the appearance of the captive balloon above the battlefield after 10 o'clock that he lost his life by neglecting cover to study the unusual event.

Soon after 11 o'clock the Gordon Highlanders were brought up. Advancing down the centre of the plain by short rushes they succeeded in getting to within 400 yards of the trenches. The fruitless attempt brought further losses—grim tokens to the valour of the Gordons. Shortly after 1 o'clock groups on the right troubled by enfilading fire received orders to retire. Others seeing this, and unaware that general orders were to hang on until nightfall, began to fall back also towards the guns. These men were eventually stopped to form a line 1,000 yards from the trenches.

The unauthorised retirement during which men rose from the ground and poured back across the open veldt exposed to heavy fire caused the most severe losses of the day. Until then Methuen still had hopes of succeeding with another dawn attack on the trenches.

The Boer artillery kept unexpectedly silent all day, until the late afternoon.

Assisted by the information transmitted by telephone from the balloon, making its first ascent, the British guns were a steadying influence all through the battle. Howitzers dropped shells on the Boer horse lines in the rear with the location reported from the balloon's telephone.

The immediate cause of the failure at Magersfontein rested in the mistiming by a few minutes of the deployment of the Highland Brigade under trying circumstances. For this misfortune 'Andy' Wauchope, a dedicated soldier, gave his life.

Methuen had counted so much on the success of the Highlanders' initial assault that the failure left him with no alternative plan of attack. His remaining troops were already committed. Along the railway practically no action took place all day. The Guards holding the line against the low folds between the Modder River and Magersfontein had little more than sporadic fighting throughout the day. The enemy did not retire overnight as Methuen may have hoped and as they did at the Riet River. The next morning the Boers still held their positions in strength.

In the light of morning ambulances and stretcher bearers continued the work of bringing in the dead and the wounded as they had done all through the night. Before a truce could be arranged the ambulances sometimes came under fire, so much so that some of the wounded asked to be left alone rather than attract attention by being moved. The British losses in the battle of Magersfontein were 971 killed, wounded and missing.

Among the problems confronting Methuen before he made the decision to retire was that of supplying water to the troops in the field. When the decision was made the whole force returned to the camp at Modder River at dusk. Under instructions from General Sir Redvers Buller the British stayed where they were, content to hold the position at Modder River station. Hostilities from then on were confined to routine artillery exchanges, while both armies strengthened their relative positions.

Captain J. H. Bruche, a Victorian Special Service Officer who marched with the Highlanders to Magersfontein, said: "The rain was so heavy that it rather helped the column, the approach of which otherwise might have been betrayed by a lightning flash. The night was so black it was impossible to see the line in front, though you could touch the men by reaching out your hand. There was the vague sense of being one of a large body of men without proof of it. There was not a sound except the one instruction whispered over and over again by the company commanders to impress it on the minds of the men. "No loading without orders until daylight. Only the bayonet to be used."

'Wire fences—not barbed wire—had to be dealt with between the Orange Free State and Cape Colony boundaries which lay across the path of the British advance. The Boers' opening fire came as a continuous roar

for about half a minute, then followed a slight pause, broken by a repetition of the roar. Each roar marked the emptying of the Boers' Mauser magazines, the slight pause the time taken to insert more clips of cartridges.

'Had the Highlanders been deployed when the Boers opened fire the pipers would have sounded the charge and the impetus of the first rush would have carried the brigade into the Boer trenches before the enemy could stop it. And the brigade would have been deployed but just at the moment the word was given the leading files came on a belt of mimosa thorn and Wauchope decided to pass through it in file. The mimosa thicket was broader than he supposed, and doubts as to the wisdom of going further in massed formation must have come to him, for while yet in the thorn he gave the order to deploy and the Boer fire commenced at that instant. It caught the brigade at its greatest disadvantage—halted and partly deployed.

'The discipline of the march was splendid, so too was the steadiness of 'G' Battery of the RFA next morning, as they sat in drill order fired at by the Boer guns. As each shell went just over the battery, every horse threw up its head at the scream, but the drivers sat on their backs like stoics.'

When the Highlanders fell back, the escort from 'G' Battery—two dismounted squadrons of the 12th Lancers and the New South Wales Lancers and a mounted infantry unit under Major Percy W. Milton—went forward to occupy some of the lost ground and to counteract snipers operating from the scrubby folds on the right flank of the position. The enemy quickly noting their presence greeted them with a renewed burst of fire from the Mausers.

Lieut-Colonel Byron gave his account: 'The Boers steadily crawled along from bush to bush, never stopping except to snipe at us. As they use smokeless powder it was next to impossible to get more than a fleeting glimpse of them.

'I was sent to extend the New South Wales Lancers, to try and stop the sniping, and on crossing less than 50 yards of open space alone, I must have had 20 shots fired at me. The fire was very hot and all we could do was to fire a volley every now and then in their direction. The horse artillery swung around two guns and fired shrapnel which covers a good deal of ground, but as there was nothing definite to aim at they could only fire generally over our heads. However, it kept the Boers at a more respectful distance.

'It was now about 7.45 a.m. and the Highlanders to our front having lost most of their officers were naturally a bit disorganised, and kept falling back on the artillery. My party of the New South Wales Lancers was about a 100 yards on the right of the whole attacking line, and presently I saw Major Milton commanding the mounted infantry on my immediate left fall mortally wounded. The only officer near him, Lieutenant Conie, rushed

to him and was instantly shot through both thighs, but was able with assistance to hobble to the rear under the friendly cover of some bushes.

'The mounted infantry—what was left of them—being without officers melted away, and I was alone with but five men in front of the supporting party of Lancers. We succeeded to a certain extent in masking the Boer fire. There was then nothing to do, however, but to fall back on the main supporting party. We tried to get back singly, and fairly succeeded, but the moment I raised myself on my feet a Mauser bullet passed through my right leg. I dropped under a bush again, and having satisfied myself that the bone was untouched, I waited a few minutes and hobbling 15 yards or so at a time with halts behind a bush, managed to get back 60 or 70 yards in all.

'By this time of course, I was unable to move my leg as it had stiffened up, so all I could do was to encourage the Highlanders and the Lancers near me. Presently a young English Lancer within a few feet of me, rolled over with a groan; a bullet had gone through his arm severing the artery. I saw he was bleeding to death, but as I could not move, I encouraged him by saying that if he could crawl to me, I would fix him up alright. He managed to roll over a yard or so. I whipped out a bandage, and with my knife cut off the soaked sleeve of his jacket and put on a rough tourniquet. I cut off a little branch of the bush, put it through the bandage, twisted it round (causing him dreadful pain of course) and tied it to his shoulder strap. Whilst doing so I had of course to raise myself a little, and instantly the bullets came whistling through the little shrub, causing the leaves to fall in a shower over us.

'About 3 p.m. we saw an ambulance wagon marked with a Red Cross flag and drawn by 10 mules approaching. I had been lying wounded for six hours and the ambulance picked up our little lot of wounded and made its way back to the dressing station about 7 p.m.'

Trooper Charles Webster, of the New South Wales Lancers, recorded his experiences on the field at Magersfontein: 'We had not been out half an hour before the artillery blazed away 1,100 yards from the enemy, who soon poured in their return fire, but we had to stand to the guns. Half of us were ordered to dismount and advance to seek cover a further 100 yards in front. I was one of this party, and gained the point under fire which the enemy rained on us, but happily without effect. I was not sorry that we gained shelter, where we remained shooting for about five hours. It was no treat lying on wet ground and bullets flying all around, which when they strike the ground, make a dull noise like an egg dropping in boiling fat. The Boers have a class of sharpshooters, and when any of us showed in the least degree you would hear the ping of the bullet.

'We received orders to return, and when doing so were treated to volley

after volley, but nobody was hurt. After returning, we followed the guns under the shelter of a hill where we had a good position. We managed under difficulty to get breakfast, but no drink, and as the heat was terrible, this was no joke. We managed to dry our clothes on our backs.'

After relating how the main body of the Highland Brigade was cut up in front of the trenches, Trooper Webster continued: 'About 200 of the Black Watch, in advance of the main body, stormed the trenches, but were to a man shot down. The infantry that escaped slaughter never rallied again that day, and no wonder after walking into such a trap. It was through this terrible mistake that we were put in the firing line.'

'We camped where we were that night ready for action next morning, but later in the day received orders to retire, which we no sooner proceeded to do than the Boers began to shell. We were the last to leave the field.'

The Australian correspondent Frank Wilkinson arrived by train at Modder River station only an hour or so after the Highland Brigade set out on the fateful march. At Enslin, a small siding below the Modder River, he learned from the driver of a passing train that a battle was about to take place.

Leaving his bags in the care of the engine driver at Modder River station and without the slightest knowledge of the lay of the country he hurried out into the darkness and the rain in an effort to locate the troops. Finally he stumbled on a convoy whose members told him the general direction taken by the column. Wandering along further in the darkness Wilkinson at last sat down exhausted on an ant heap.

Soon the first streaks of dawn appeared. Then in Wilkinson's own words: 'From a hiccup the fire suddenly developed into the mighty roaring cough of some million-throated monster. The air sang and danced with swishing lead. The noise grew to a deafening roar as of 10,000 railway trucks banging into one another. . . . It was broad daylight by this time . . . I gained the next rise and found a friendly rock. I also found that I could see just as far as the crest of the next ridge, a quarter of a mile away. This is a feature of the South African veldt. But I knew I must be getting closer to the fighting zone, for moving figures in khaki began to cross and recross my front—kilted Highlanders, running for all they were worth—running and dropping down in disorderly groups, as from sheer exhaustion. Some regained their feet and started off again full pelt; others lay longer.'

'Poor fellows, they must be thoroughly pumped. I went on to the one lying nearest me and asked him where everybody was going in such a hurry. He turned a pair of glazed eyes on me and opened his mouth as though to speak, but blood instead of sound issued from his lips. Ping-pong sang a couple of bullets overhead. He motioned me wildly to go away. I crawled on hands and knees to the next man and offered my water bottle. He was quite dead.'

'Another, racing wildly, fell prone in the soft sand alongside me, his eyeballs almost starting from his head: "For the love of God, give me a whisky," he gasped. I administered the dose and put the question, "But where are you going?" "Where have we been you mean. They marched us into the mouth of hell, and we had to come back the best way we could." . . . I moved over to the left. Stretcher bearers were moving hither and thither carrying heavy burdens to the rear . . . Overhead soared a huge captive balloon with a man and a telescope in the basket. Ambulance wagons drove up; doctors took off their coats and turned up their shirt-sleeves. They stretched blankets over the butts of rifles, stuck bayonets down into the ground, to protect the wounded from the heat of the now blazing sun until their turn came to be attended to. The veldt was turned into a shambles.'

'I spoke to some of the less seriously wounded. Yes, the Highland Brigade had been horribly cut up. Dead and dying were still lying in hundreds close under the Boer trenches and they would have to lie there until dark. The doctors were doing all they could, but it was impossible to do much under such a heavy fire . . . "Lie down you almighty idiot," cried an infuriated individual from the depths of some long grass close by. "Can't you see you are drawing the fire." I lay down and buried my face in the ground. The storm began to break out afresh . . . I began to count the intervals between shots, and wonder whether they would ever get the range of my little shelter and then I believe I dropped off to sleep.'

'When I regained consciousness the place was alive with khaki figures, all digging little breastworks with their bayonets. The sun was beating down with terrific force on the back of my neck, my water-bottle was quite empty, and altogether I began to arrive at the conclusion that this game of war corresponding was not all that my imagination had pictured it.'

'As for seeing the fight, I could have watched it almost as well from the top of a bus in Piccadilly. Thoroughly disorganised and exhausted, I started to walk back to the hotel. I found the whole army retiring in the same direction.'

Lord Methuen's army lay some 600 miles from Cape Town but only 15 miles from the beleaguered town of Kimberley. His communications depended on a 3 feet 6 inches single-track railway. The newly-arrived Colonial troops, Australians, Canadians and New Zealanders, were camped along the railway between De Aar and Enslin. They were all desperately eager to fight.

On Christmas Day 1899, Corporal J. R. Gilfillan, of the New South Wales Mounted Rifles, wrote from De Aar: 'The train travels very slowly here, and has stopped at every station on the way up for scouts to see if the road were clear. Every culvert and every bridge had a sentry posted over it to prevent the Boers from wrecking the trains in dangerous places.'

'There are 10,000 troops here under canvas and we are camped in the middle of a great dusty plain with not a tree in sight. In fact after leaving the Cape Town area we didn't sight half a dozen trees in the whole journey of over 500 miles—nothing but a vast dried up land. You are just about sitting down to a good Xmas dinner, and—Oh Lord, it's awful. The dust in your tea and meat. The place is so cut up with traffic. There are thousands of teams of mules—12 in a team—and buck-wagons passing the place every day, drawing food and rations. That is what makes the place so dusty.'

The New South Wales Infantry stationed at Orange River soon heard camp rumours of an impending battle up north. Officers of the contingent wasted no time in eagerly pressing claims for an early move northwards. They even offered to march the men to Modder River station. The Staff Officer replied that the British Army would have no use for foot-sore infantry. For the time being they must stay where they were. Not long afterwards W. J. Lambie, correspondent for the *Melbourne Age*, wrote: 'I regard our absence from Magersfontein as little short of providential, in the light of the disastrous events of the day.'

Eventually the troops did move further up the line beyond Belmont to Enslin, described as a siding on the open veldt with one tree, one ganger's hut and one muddy well of water. The encamped troops, mostly Australians, were occupied on long patrols or on picket duty on kopjes and guarding the railway from the Boers. The long length of the railway was protected by soldiers on foot with pickets at every bridge and culvert and patrolled by horsemen. From distant kopjes the Australians watched the shelling at Magersfontein, where the batteries indulged daily in duels with Cronje's gunners.

At Modder River the detachment of New South Wales Lancers known as 'The Fighting 28', had settled under canvas to the east of the railway in a tree-shaded spot in the Twee Rivier, quartering with the British mounted infantry. Of their activities at this time Frank Wilkinson wrote:

'They have taught some Imperial Tommies a few things about horses since they were quartered with the mounted infantry, and although they have been doing mounted infantry work most of the time, you could not put them astray. Nothing could have been more amusing than the awe-struck gapes of bystanding Tommies, while our Lancers mounted and rode a mob of young Cape ponies which had come up from the remount depot. Most of the British mounted infantry had more or less painful experiences with these animals. In the first place, they did not survive the first prop. But our Australian coves seemed to be able to sit on anything. They jumped into the saddle and were never shifted. It was a great experience for the mounted infantry men.'

By Christmas Day, with the exception of a detachment of the New South Wales Lancers, the Australian contingents had been without any real

fighting beyond a few shots fired on patrol. Trooper P. H. Wickerson recorded the general feelings of the men: 'We would like them to give us a chance to have a go at the Boers. We are all eager for action, the whole line being impatient. Whenever a few men are asked to go and see if there are any of the enemy behind the kopjes, they all want to go. It's wonderful how eager the men are to fight.'

'We keep alive by playing cricket and football, although it is a bit warm for the latter game. New South Wales played a team from the other Australian forces and were beaten 4-3.'

By this time all the Australians were serving with the Kimberley Relief Force with the exception of a detachment of the New South Wales Lancers and the Australian Horse attached to General French south of Colesberg. At Enslin an attempt was made to form an Australian Regiment under Colonel J. C. Hoad, a Victorian Special Service Officer, but the troops remained spread up and down the line of communication. Before long they became further split up, so the idea never really came to anything.

By and large the idea of forming their own regiment did not meet with particular favour from the Australians. There was a general feeling that unless they were attached to Imperial regiments, the chances of seeing much fighting would be few. Correspondent Lambie reported differently when he wrote: 'I must regard the possible disruption of the Australian Regiment as a calamity which the Australian public will bitterly regret.'

After the long voyage across the Indian Ocean from Fremantle, the landfall at Table Bay was warmly welcomed by new contingents of Australians. Their arrival was described by a Victorian, Nurse Ethel Mary Bernhard Smith, in the following words: 'It was glorious, the first glimpse of land, and watching the sun rise over Table Mountain, a little to the right. The air was as fresh as a cold shower. It was a beautiful sight coming into Table Bay. There are 99 troopships in the Bay, three hospital ships and ever so many other ships besides.'

At Cape Town the equipment and the uniforms of the contingents underwent a fair amount of change. Officers' swords were sent to store and the officers were issued with a rifle in the same way as every trooper. Everything bright was removed or replaced with leather or dull khaki. The men were issued with Lee Metford magazine rifles. W. J. Lambie wrote: 'Our men are taking to the new magazine rifles like a new toy.' They had also to overcome the problem of trying to squeeze into jackets that did not fit. At this time two-thirds of the colonial troops did not fit easily into the standard British jacket.

On arrival at Enslin a further rearrangement took place to reduce the weight of the packs. Corporal Edwin Kerans had this to say: 'We have got

rid of a lot of our kit by sending it back to Cape Town. Our turnout now consists of drill trousers and jacket, cholera belt, drawers, socks and coats, all worn on us with belts. Magazine rifles and ammunition, 150 rounds, overcoat without cape on the back with mess tin in the overcoat. Inside the coat we have an extra pair of socks, vaseline, towel and soap. In the kit bag we have boots, shirt, a waterproof sheet and half a blanket.

'A few of the boys are suffering from dysentery. The water is responsible and plays up with them to some extent. We have all cultivated beards so that even our friends would have difficulty in placing us.'

From Enslin Camp on Christmas Eve, Trooper Gus Ebeling, a Victorian, felt compelled to write: 'The New South Wales men do not get on at all well with the rest of the Australians. They think too much of themselves, and talk as though they owned the world. They wear a big "A" on their shoulder straps, and the officers have "Australia" in full.'

On the other hand Lambie reported the matter rather differently. He regarded the development as something bearing a new and important historical significance, as indeed it did. Lambie wrote: 'The New South Wales men have apparently anticipated Federation. On their shoulder is the letter "A", which stands for Australia.'

So it happened that in the closing weeks of the year 1899 with the Relief Force stretched along the veldt in line with the railway not many miles from Kimberley, soldiers for the first time proudly bore the name of Australia on their battle dress. A few weeks later Australians also fell in battle. They were the first soldiers from units officially raised in Australia to make the supreme sacrifice.

About Christmas time the troops received the first mail from home. Some of the men had already shown themselves to be very competent letter writers. Trooper Stanley Walton wrote briefly and to the point about the Christmas dinner: 'We expected pudding, but got only boiled beef.'

There may have been no Christmas pudding but Queen Victoria sent 100,000 tins of chocolate for her troops. These were not delivered to the Australians until after Christmas. In most cases they were regarded as souvenirs and promptly posted home.

Camp life along the line of communications in the severe heat was most uncomfortable. The slightest breeze carried a fine red dust into the tents leaving a veneer of red silt. Trees and shade were almost non-existent. All water had to be boiled. A young Australian summed up his immediate discomforts in one short descriptive sentence: 'You must excuse this letter, as I have only the bottom of the canteen tin to write on.'

Captain William Holmes serving with the New South Wales Mounted Rifles described the Modder River environment, and commented on the military situation: 'We are now in camp at Modder River, 640 miles from

Cape Town. We are engaged in guarding the lines of communication. We have patrols of mounted men and infantry sent out hourly day and night. The sun is hot and nights are cold for sleeping on the ground. A day or two before we arrived the Boers broke off the telegraph posts, which are of cast iron, short from the ground. Should the supplies be cut off by blocking the railway line the Army might as well go home.

'The railway station is riddled with bullets and shrapnel. There is nothing but veldt and stony kopjes for miles and miles. We boil the water and place it in canvas bags to cool down. There is no shade or shelter. The tent is almost too hot and dusty to bear.

'We have to keep all the hills well guarded and do not see much of the enemy. They keep hovering round to push in and damage the railway. The line of communication is so long that it takes thousands of men to guard it properly, which detracts from the strength of the absolute front. We have only been fired upon once, and fired at the enemy twice. There are no stores or canteens here. As the water is not too good, I am drinking cold tea.

'Captain [J. G.] Legge sent to Cape Town for some wine, and at Christmas we had a free issue of one glass to each man. We commandeered a calf and had veal and veal broth for two days. It was alright.'

Trooper G. W. Poole, New South Wales Mounted Rifles, later invalided home, wrote from Enslin: 'We get one loaf of bread a day, a one-pound loaf, hard, tough and nearly black, one pint of coffee or tea for breakfast; one pint of soup for dinner, with a bit of meat in it; and for tea the same as for breakfast. Occasionally we get two tins of jam for 11 men—there are 11 of us in a tent. The water is a bit scarce, only one well for about 1,500 men to draw from, and it is hard to get a decent wash. About once a week we get a bath. There are three or four round holes dug in the ground. A great waterproof sheet is spread over them. About six or seven men get into them, and some of the men carry water and throw it over the bathers. I forgot to mention that sometimes (about half time) we are on bully beef and biscuit rations, that is one pound of tinned meat and one pound of biscuits a day. If you soak them all day the biscuits won't get soft.'

On 31 December a flying column left the camp at Belmont. In an effort to conceal its real objective the column veered east from the railway before recrossing the line and camping at Thornhill on the west of the railway. At Thornhill the column commander, Colonel T. D. Pilcher of the Northumberland Fusiliers, addressed all ranks to make known the objective. They were about to attack a laager in the Sunnyside kopjes, about 60 miles southwest of Kimberley, near the town of Douglas.

The column nearly 500 strong was made up of 250 Queensland Mounted Infantry, 100 Canadian Infantry, two guns of the Royal Field Artillery, and a Maxim gun. Early morning showers, by dampening the rising dust,

helped to hide the approach of the column from the Boers in the laager. In a brush with Boer pickets on New Year's Day 1900 an advanced patrol of Queenslanders lost two men: Trooper D. C. McLeod died instantly; Trooper V. S. Jones was also shot. His body was found next day among the rocks where he crawled to die. Only one man in the patrol of five returned unscathed.

Trooper McLeod had served for three years as a gunner in the Queensland Permanent Artillery. He was in Victoria for a special training course when the Queensland contingent was being raised and at once returned to Brisbane to enlist. Trooper Jones had had some pre-war training with the Queensland Mounted Infantry. He was an employee of the Mount Morgan Mining Company in central Queensland. He started with the company as office boy and at the time of his enlistment held the responsible position of paymaster.

Shortly after 11 o'clock the guns began to shell the kopjes. Under instructions not to press home the attack the Canadians engaged the enemy. Meanwhile the Queenslanders moved in from the right flank in extended formation. Taking advantage of whatever cover the rocks provided they kept up a steady fire. Soon after 3 o'clock the burghers hoisted the white flag. Many fled, but 40 prisoners were taken together with large quantities of rifles, ammunition and equipment. The ammunition was burnt in a huge fire and the rifles destroyed by being broken against the rocks.

At Sunnyside the wounded were attended by the New South Wales Army Medical Corps. The Corps had succeeded in getting away to the front after a month of inactivity in Cape Town. Corporal H. F. Ransom wrote: 'We camped at Sunnyside on New Year's night, having won our first fight easily. It was very rough work bringing down the wounded, as the fight was on the top of a very rough hill, and a man was rather heavy for two to carry. It was about 8 p.m. by the time we had all the wounded (Boers and all) safely in tents.'

The fight on the kopje on New Year's Day was a small affair. Yet it was there near the junction of the Riet and the Vaal Rivers that two Queenslanders became the first Australian enlisted soldiers to die in battle. In a letter written at Douglas dated 2 January, Sydney Hill, a Queensland trooper, wrote: 'It was the 1st of January 1900—a day and year to be remembered. Queensland has the honour of losing the first blood shed by the Australian colonies in the defence of Britain's rights.'

At least one Queenslanders at Sunnyside had seen previous action: Trooper George Moss had fought in the Zulu War in 1879.

Captain Harry Chauvel, the leader of 'A' Company in the Queensland charge, later had a monument erected at the historic spot. This small monument was the first Australian military memorial erected on a battlefield.

Some years ago the memorial, bearing the crest and motto of the Queensland Mounted Infantry, had almost disintegrated. The ruined memorial was removed to Kimberley and incorporated with the mortar used in binding the permanent British Memorial erected by the War Graves Commission in the Garden of Remembrance which commemorates all the soldiers who fell in the area.

Captain Chauvel later became Lieut-General Sir Harry Chauvel, leader of the Desert Mounted Corps in Palestine in the 1914-18 War. He was the first Australian to reach the rank of Lieut-General. His Desert Mounted Corps was the largest body of cavalry employed in modern times under a single commander.

When he returned to Belmont Captain Chauvel wrote: 'I don't know that I did anything in particular at Sunnyside that should be specially mentioned. The prisoners surrendered to us all, not to me in particular. I may have been a little more prominent than the others, as I was mounted on a Boer pony, which I had annexed at the top of the kopje, fortunately, as I was absolutely done. Climbing kopjes is not as easy as it reads, and I was very weak at the time, having just got over an attack of fever which I had at Orange River.'

The Queenslanders were not slow to emulate the Boer practice of using a hat as a decoy in the close fighting among the rocks to entice an enemy to break cover in some degree or to make known his position. Trooper H. G. Hinton, under close fire for the first time, said: 'I shall never forget the climbing we had without a drop of water. The sun was terribly hot. I was behind a fair-sized rock and was about to blaze away, when it occurred to me to try the Boer dodge and I put my hat on top of the rock. If my head had been as exposed as my hat I would have been with poor McLeod and Jones. My hat was not on the rock 10 seconds when a bullet went through it.'

The next morning, 2 January 1900, the column entered Douglas where the troops were enthusiastically greeted by the loyal inhabitants. As Colonel Pilcher had no intention of garrisoning the town in an area full of Republican sympathisers plans were made to evacuate the loyal citizens. The troops destroyed a large quantity of ammunition found in the town, some of which came from within the ceiling of the courthouse. Wagons were loaded with personal belongings and the people accompanied the troops to Belmont. Many of the youngest children made the 60 miles journey carried on the horses of the Queenslanders.

Trooper S. E. Hill wrote about the entry into Douglas and described how the troops mixed with the citizens: 'A flag was floating on the roof of a house lately vacated by a Boer, representing the British colours reversed. Our Colonel at once sent Sergeant Harry Walker and Trooper Peter

Knudsen to haul down this insulting emblem, instructing them that should they be interfered with to shoot down those who were responsible. On coming to the centre of the town we were lined up and then dismissed to roam a bit at ease. Immediately soldiers and civilians were mixed in happy confusion, the ladies of the place coming in for the greater share of our boys' attention. One of them to my knowledge was soon on a friendly footing, so much that within half an hour he was playing a solo on a very fine violin accompanied by one of the young ladies on the piano. And this in Boerland.'

Trooper C. L. Drew wrote: 'Colonel Pilcher ordered the bell outside the courthouse to be rung, and the people assembled, while the Colonel standing bare-headed, made a speech and offered to escort all loyal subjects safely to Belmont. Farrier-Sergeant George Wright and Troopers Bill Fox, Jim Kelly and Ernest Neale were detailed to destroy a pontoon bridge across the river. We camped in the main street that night in our overcoats at the heads of our horses.'

On 3 January the general store was opened and the shopkeeper told the troops to take what they wanted otherwise after their departure the Boers would loot the premises. The men took everything from handkerchiefs to petticoats and corsets. Some were content with socks, singlets and knives. The Queenslanders were in high humour until the order came through that all goods from the store were to be returned at once—an order that was only partially obeyed.

Of the Sunnyside episode a correspondent of the London *Daily Mail* wrote: 'The picturesque figures of the expedition were the Australians, whose very postures and loose costumes reminded us of the cowboys brought to London by Buffalo Bill. All of them wore wide-brimmed hats. In some cases the brims of the hats were turned up, in others not. In some cases the crowns were punched in, in others they were shaped like sugar loaves. No two men carried their carbines in the same manner.'

'The British soldier speaks in wonder of the amazing quickness of the Australian in mastering the country. The Colonials can find their way in the darkest night of any district in which they have gone by day, and every man can fight on his own account without having to be officered. Already I have been told they know the country as well as Rimington's Scouts.'

Trooper Alexander Hardie from Bowral writing to his father from Enslin on 24 December 1899, commented on Rimington's Scouts: 'We have men here they call Rimington's Guides—very smart men. They come in very handy, as they understand the Boer language, and interpret it into English, so that we know what the enemy are doing. Some of them were in the Jameson Raid.'

A few weeks after the action at Sunnyside, W. J. Lambie reported that the wide-brimmed slouch hat worn by the Australians resembled so much the hats worn by the burghers that it was about to be replaced by the standard British helmet. Lambie agreed that the change was sensible. Nevertheless, he protested: 'They can now be scarcely distinguished from the British.'

In the middle of January the New South Wales Mounted Rifles, under Captain John Antill, happy to be relieved of duty along the line of communications trekked 113 miles from De Aar to Prieska in three days. The column commanded by Colonel E. A. H. Alderson, an Imperial Officer, consisted of mounted infantry with two Maxim guns, 80 New South Wales Mounted Rifles and 20 Rimington's Scouts.

Prieska, a small town on the banks of the Orange River within the boundaries of the Cape Province, was reported to be the centre of a rebel concentration of Dutch farmers who sympathised with the policies of the Republics. From Prieska the burghers were raiding the countryside south of the Orange River.

The British column arrived in the vicinity of Prieska before sunrise, camping outside the town with the burghers unaware of their presence. At daybreak the men took up positions near the river bank. Antill's detachment, opening fire from across the river, had little trouble in dispersing the enemy from the Pont Drift and gaining possession of the town.

Corporal Frank Owens wrote from Prieska: 'I did not have a good position when we started firing and, when the enemy returned fire, four or five bullets struck the ground all around me. I can assure you I saw the danger at once and soon shifted my carcass behind a big boulder. I took off my helmet and put it on one side of the stone—my head on the other. The helmets are yellow and of course easily seen. I kept on firing at the Boers and they at my helmet, which they only succeeded in hitting once. That would have been enough had my head been in it.'

A day or two later the colonials attacked a farmhouse 16 miles from Prieska, taking prisoners, ammunition, horses, carts and a flock of sheep. By providing themselves with mutton they had a welcome respite from bully beef and biscuits. They locked the prisoners behind bars in the local gaol. Pickets were posted around the town. In the intervals between patrolling the river and the drifts the New South Welshmen managed to play a game of cricket against a Prieska team; they won by an innings.

The British Mounted Infantry returned to De Aar, leaving the colonials to hold the town. When everything seemed quiet the colonials also retired along the Britstown road taking the prisoners with them and blowing up the river punt at Prieska as they left. The column fell back to a farm at Hoewater owned by Cecil Rhodes. Learning that the enemy was again

established in Prieska the column returned strengthened by the South African Light Horse and a six-gun battery. When they advanced on the town the enemy dispersed into open country. The column stayed only two days.

Corporal Sydney Weekes, New South Wales Mounted Rifles wrote: 'Prieska, Orange River, 9 January 1900. Our boys enjoyed the attack on Prieska immensely, and the English colonel complimented Captain Antill on the coolness his men displayed under fire. The war is at a standstill at present. We went out on Saturday and captured a farmhouse, brought the men in and lodged them in gaol. The Boers are a rough set with bushy beards. All wear felt hats, and they live and eat and sleep together like blacks. Let them come on. We will give them a warm time.

'The people here call the Australians "Gore Hunters". We are a rough-looking lot now, sunburnt and growing beards, and our clothes are dirty, as it is of no use washing them. Our hats and plumes were taken away, and we are wearing khaki helmets. Our horses are not doing well, but we captured several Boer ponies, which though small, are very hardy. For New Year's Day dinner we had a splendid feed — two biscuits and water. We stood up in the sun eating the meal. In the evening we had the same. I tell you I thought of West End, Molong, and the acacias around the old house, the ham and duff and other things.

'We had a church parade on Sunday. It was something to sit down in a big cool church. The sermon was in English. All the girls were dressed in their best, but the worst of it is they cannot speak English. I am learning a few Dutch words. The darkies here are a dirty lazy lot. They drive our wagons for us—12 mules to one wagon—and kick up the devil's row when they are on the road. Today I am in charge of a Cossack post close to the town. We had a great feast for dinner. Curried rice, white bread and jam. It cost us six shillings, the whole lot. Bread is two shillings a loaf, meat 8d a pound.

'Everything else is dear, and it takes all our pay to buy extras which we must do, for we would starve on the Government ration.'

CHAPTER 6

Buller's Natal campaign, December 1899

Having completed the investment of Ladysmith, where the Natal Field Force lay immobilised, the commandos penetrated beyond Colenso towards Pietermaritzburg 80 miles to the south. The British had only a small mixed force of regular troops to defend southern Natal and they were in no position to take the offensive there.

Colenso, a small village consisting of a few private residences of railway workers, a hotel, a general store and a school, was shelled by the Boers on 3 November 1899. The garrison retreated down the line nearly 20 miles to Estcourt. At this time only a thin force remained to prevent the Boers invading right down to Durban. In a total of 2,300 men a great number were infantry. Only 500 were regular soldiers, the others being colonial volunteers.

The volunteers consisted of the long-established volunteer units from Natal and the units hastily raised in Natal of Uitlander refugees from the Transvaal. With one exception the new units were mounted infantry. They were all commanded by British officers and raised to operate not independently but in conjunction with British infantry. On 28 September 1899 the entire establishment of the Volunteer Corps in Natal of about 2,250 men was mobilised just as it was in 1879 at the time of the Zulu War. In that campaign the Natal Carbineers lost 37 men at Isandhlwana.

In Ladysmith the permanent volunteer units totalled about 1,000 men. Among them were three mounted squadrons — 508 men — of the Natal Carbineers and 220 men of the Natal Mounted Rifles. A squadron of Carbineers fought at Talana Hill. The remainder of the volunteer force was scattered at posts south of the Tugela. The Uitlander volunteers had five squadrons of the Imperial Light Horse in Ladysmith and one squadron at Estcourt. There was also a detachment of the Natal Mounted Police at Estcourt.

In October 1899 General Sir George White authorised the formation of a mounted infantry force of 500 men recruited from Uitlanders and commanded by Lieut-Colonel E. C. Bethune. In November another mounted force of 500 Uitlanders was raised under an officer of the Royal Scots Fusiliers. Soon after his arrival in Natal General Buller authorised the formation of the South African Light Horse, a regiment of 8 squadrons each of 100 men. It was mainly recruited from Uitlanders, South African colonials and a few loyal Afrikaners. The Imperial Light Infantry, 1,000 strong and almost solely a Uitlander force, was ready for action early in January 1900.

In Natal the Australian refugees from the Transvaal were joined by numbers of their fellow countrymen who, on disembarking independently at the port of Durban, were eager to enlist in the squadrons being raised and so reach the front line.

The Boers were slow to move from Colenso village. On 9 November a troopship arriving at Cape Town was immediately diverted to Durban. On 3 November, the same day as the first reinforcements under Major-General H. J. T. Hildyard arrived at Durban, the Boers advanced 5 miles from Colenso to Chieveley. Pushing on towards Estcourt they were too late to prevent the arrival there of the troops under Hildyard, who assumed temporary command in Natal.

Trooper T. Sullivan, a Queenslander serving in the ranks of the Natal Mounted Police, recorded his experiences at this time: 'It so happened while out scouting with a comrade we came on some enemy scouts and exchanged shots, but as we were only two to 500 enemy we had to detour across country, as we were cut off from our only way of retreat to our camp. As the Boers made so sure of catching us they stopped firing at us.

'Presently we found five Boers in front of us and as we were well-mounted and armed with revolvers as well as carbines we returned carbines and drew our six shooters. We cantered straight into the five Boers who sat on their saddles and waited for us as if we were Boers also. When we were 20 or 30 yards from them we put our horses at full swing and charged, each covering and killing his man. The other three seemed dumbfounded, but one of them levelled his Mauser and was just taking aim when I shot up and hit him on the breast and dismounted him.

'I then told the other two to hand over their arms and come with me which they did. I tied their horses together, my comrade taking the leading rein. I followed up the rear with a stick, and we were on our way in a shorter space of time than it takes to tell the tale. But when our plan was seen by the main body of Boers we were hotly pursued for a distance of 8 miles. We thanked our horses I can tell you, and indeed they are a pair very hard to beat.

'We had to bring our prisoners to Estcourt, and when I handed them over to General Hildyard he said it was so plucky an act as he had heard of. To show his appreciation for my service, he then and there put me on his personal bodyguard, where I have been ever since.'

Early in November when the advance of the Boers from Colenso was expected hourly the British fell into the routine of sending an armoured train towards Colenso daily, for observation purposes. Apart from one or two skirmishes these journeys passed uneventfully.

On 15 November the train steamed forward as usual carrying the crew and a breakdown gang to carry out track repairs. Detachments of the Dublin Fusiliers and the Durban Light Infantry were on board as well as a few naval ratings with a 7-pounder gun. The entire force of 120 men was under the command of Captain J. A. L. Haldane, a Gordon Highlander recently wounded at Elands-laagte. The correspondent of the London *Morning Post*, Mr Winston Churchill, also travelled on the train.

All went well on the run to Chieveley. Some Boers were seen but no closer than a mile away. When Haldane telegraphed Estcourt from Chieveley he received orders to return. Meanwhile burghers along the section of the railway between Frere and Chieveley having quietly allowed the train through without incident planned an ambush for the return run. They chose a bend on a slope a mile and a half on the Chieveley side of Frere at a point where fitters had fitted a guide rail along the curve to prevent the trains leaving the rails. The burghers filled the gap between the rail proper and the guide rail with stones. On high ground well away from the track they waited confidently.

As the train approached a rapid burst of fire from 600 yards had the desired effect. The engine driver sharply increased the speed. When the train failed to take the bend the three trucks in front of the engine were derailed. A shell hit the rear trucks, smashing the coupling that attached them to the engine. The two foremost trucks fell away from the line but the one immediately in front of the engine swung right across the track, completely blocking it. Fortunately the engine kept to the rails.

In the fighting that followed Captain Haldane and the troops kept up a brisk rifle fire from the rear of the train to prevent the burghers closing in. The ancient 7-pounder gun of limited use was soon put out of action. Up

front at the scene of the derailment 20 volunteers led by Winston Churchill worked in the open for over half an hour under constant fire levering and prodding the wrecked truck. The engine driver was hit by a shell fragment and seemed likely to give up a job fast becoming too hot. Churchill persuaded him to stay on duty with the comfortable assurance that a man simply did not get hit twice on the same day. So the engine was kept moving against the blocked truck jarring first one way and then another. At the end of an hour the track was cleared.

Under the direction of Churchill the wounded were placed on the engine and tender. He instructed the others to jog along the track using the lee of the engine for cover while it steamed slowly away, despite the leaks evident from the bullet-pitted boiler. Amid quickening enemy fire the engine gathered pace towards Frere and the men were unable to keep up with it. They scattered, some eventually finding their way to Frere.

Winston Churchill turned back alone seeking to join Haldane and his men being unaware that they were already prisoners. By doing so he met with direct fire from Boer riflemen but continued to scramble along the railway embankment until he suddenly found himself covered by a mounted burgher at 40 yards. Churchill discovered he was unarmed for his revolver had fallen from the holster during the process of clearing the track. He had no other alternative than to throw up his hands.

That evening in the pouring rain Winston Churchill walked to Colenso with Haldane and 70 captured troops. They were locked up that night in corrugated iron sheds near the station. In defence of the armoured train the British had lost five killed and 45 wounded.

At De Aar in December 1901 a parade took place for the presentation of pocket watches to the civilian engine crew, Driver W. Johnson and Fireman Rabolini. The inscribed watches were sent by Winston Churchill.

The ambushing of the armoured train near Frere did not take place without the presence of at least several of the ubiquitous Australians. George Humphries from Wollongong serving in the ranks of the Durban Light Infantry was severely wounded with bullets through both legs. He was taken prisoner and later handed over to the British in besieged Ladysmith. Private Alexander Wright also of the Durban Light Infantry went with Churchill and the other prisoners to Pretoria. Born in Sydney near Circular Quay, Wright arrived in the Transvaal in 1898. He worked on the Rand in both Johannesburg and Krugersdorp. In the Uitlander exodus he left the Transvaal for Durban in a coal truck.

By the third week in November the opportunity for the commandos to seize Pietermaritzburg and the country beyond had passed. Nevertheless they converged on both sides of the railway between Estcourt and Mooi River, 20 miles to the south. For a few days the line near Willow Grange was cut,

isolating the advanced towns from the base farther south. Troops were engaged in small actions. This proved to be the high-water mark reached by the Boers in the invasion of the Colony of Natal. When scouts reported the building up of British troops and supplies at Mooi River, General Joubert decided that his lines were over-extended and ordered a withdrawal to Colenso. The decision met with opposition from Louis Botha who advocated a daring raid on Pietermaritzburg.

When General Joubert returned to Colenso from the thrust beyond Estcourt he became very ill. Soon afterwards he left for Pretoria. The command in Natal then fell upon the shoulders of the younger Louis Botha.

On 28 November a column of 900 mounted troops under Major-General Lord Dundonald rode up along the railway to within 1,500 yards of Colenso village. They were met with heavy gun fire from the heights directly behind the river where the enemy was established along a strong defensive position. With this information Dundonald returned to camp.

Botha prepared to defend the Tugela Heights against the advancing British with a force of 8,000 burghers. The heights along which the Boers were busy entrenching rose between 500 and 1,000 feet overlooking the Tugela River, the village of Colenso and the open veldt for some miles beyond. Opposite Colenso the heights broke into a series of ridges and kopjes through which the railway wound towards Ladysmith, squeezed for some of the way between the kopjes and the river.

General Sir Redvers Buller arrived at Frere on 6 December. On the same day British reconnaissance of the open veldt facing Colenso failed to draw the Boer fire. Nothing at all was known concerning the details of the enemy positions. The army also lacked adequate maps of the river and the drifts and of the country between the river and Ladysmith, although a garrison had been in the area for many years.

Iron bridges spanned the river in two places half a mile apart. The railway bridge north of the village had been destroyed by the Boers. The road bridge immediately to the west of the village remained intact. Although normally fordable at the drifts heavy rain made passages over the river difficult.

Buller at first decided to avoid making a direct frontal attack. Without relinquishing the position before Colenso he prepared orders for a wide flanking move to the west to cross a drift there and for a march through what appeared to be less broken country on the northern bank of the river. On the same day he abandoned the idea in favour of a straight-out frontal attack centred on the river behind Colenso village.

General Buller prepared for battle by bringing up the long-range naval guns on 12 December. For the next two days the guns subjected the heights across the river to an intensive bombardment. Throughout the whole procedure the enemy held their fire. Buller doubted whether the northern bank

was held in strength. Unknown to Buller the appearance of the guns and his show of strength caused a degree of panic which for a limited period produced a vital shift in the Boer defences.

Near the southern bank of the Tugela to the east of Colenso several large kopjes rise from the veldt. The most prominent is Hlangwane, 544 feet high and 3 miles from Colenso. Due to a short sweep in the course of the river from almost directly east to north the possession of Hlangwane would have enabled the British to shell from end to end the Boer trenches overlooking Colenso, without crossing the river, and making them completely untenable. This kopje although held by the burghers constituted the weakness in the Boer positions. It was not until nine weeks later, after much fighting with heavy casualties, that Buller by taking Hlangwane kopje made the breach in the Boer line that led to the relief of Ladysmith.

On the morning of 13 December the burghers on Hlangwane seeing an infantry brigade march up to demonstrate with the naval guns immediately turned and recrossed the Tugela to the northern bank. The strategic kopje was left undefended.

Botha regarded the withdrawal so seriously that he at once telegraphed General Joubert in Pretoria informing him of the situation. Joubert replied that Hlangwane must be reoccupied without delay. After the drawing of lots the Wakkerstroom Commando was induced to cross the river. With a few additional volunteers they occupied the hill at 3 a.m. on 15 December some 40 hours after it had been vacated and no more than one hour before the British moved forward to begin battle.

On the evening of 14 December Buller met his brigade commanders to impart the plan of battle—no less than a frontal attack by infantry against the Colenso kopjes. It was midnight before the commanders received the written brigade orders. Captain W. R. Birdwood, serving with the Mounted Brigade and destined to command the Anzacs on Gallipoli and in France, later wrote: 'I could only think that Sir Redvers had received intelligence, possibly from his agents in Lourenco Marques, that the Boers did not mean to contest the position; for it seemed almost impossible to advance over rolling country against a prepared position.'¹

Four miles lay between the armies when the soldiers began the march on the morning of 15 December. They marched as though on parade against a position chosen by the enemy because of its formidable natural features. A tangled formation of hills rising to 1,000 feet rested behind a wide and winding river. In this terrain the Boers had made strong defences over many weeks of preparation.

Watching the approach of the cavalcade the enemy waited behind cover from which they had a clear field of fire. Under instructions from Botha

the road bridge remained intact. His orders were to withhold all fire until the soldiers crossed the bridge. Then the mined bridge would be blown up in the rear of the troops. By 6 o'clock the infantry brigades preceded by the 12-pounder naval guns and the field artillery were marching forward in line towards the Colenso kopjes known as Fort Wylie. Overhead the shells from the great 4.7-inch naval guns passed to pound Fort Wylie.

For the soldiers the morning began badly. On the river front to the west of the bridge the Irish Brigade, led by Major-General A. F. Hart, missed the way while still on close formation. By doing so the brigade marched deep into the Boer position, entering a long looping bend in the river the existence of which may not have been known to Hart. Once in the loop the troops were separated by the arm of the river on their left from the Bridle Drift, the river crossing which was their immediate objective. While in this predicament they were swept with intensive gun and rifle fire from all sides but without a single Boer being in sight.

The troops were caught in a deep pocket with only the very sparse cover that the veldt provides. All they could do was to extend widely keeping as close as possible to the ground. In an hour and a half the casualties rose to 523. Some who managed to make their way around to the drift found the river flowing swiftly. Also covered by enemy small arms fire it was impossible to cross. The attack in this sector completely miscarried. Buller rode down to the loop to see the situation for himself. At 8 o'clock he gave the order to withdraw.

Trooper T. Sullivan was attached to the Irish Brigade that morning. 'We left Chieveley,' he wrote in a letter, 'for Colenso on Friday 15 December at 2.30 a.m. We found the Boers entrenched on the banks of the River Tugela. As we approached they opened a withering fire on our brigade, so the order was given to swim the river and in we jumped. I left my horse behind and joined the rush. To our surprise we found the Boer entrenchments surrounded by barbed wire, so we set to work to cut a gap in the fence. We were all but through when the Boer cannon opened on us and the order was given to retire. While I was cutting my last bit of wire a shell hit the iron post on my right, and took the head clean off a Connaught Ranger. Then I thought it might be my turn next so I got back to the bank of the Tugela, and got safely over amidst a storm of shot and shell.'

Meanwhile Colonel C. J. Long, whose artillery batteries preceded the infantry in the advance, was carrying out his instructions. These were to site the guns about 1,700 yards from the river immediately to the east of the road bridge at medium range so as to reach Fort Wylie. However, Long misjudged the distance, lessening the range by grouping the guns in a slight hollow 1,000 yards from the south bank of the river.

While these manoeuvres were taking place the sound of firing came from the sector on the left where Hart was approaching the river. Almost simul-

¹ Field Marshal Lord Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown* (1941), pp. 95-6.

taneously a concentrated fire from Fort Wylie burst around Long's 12 gun teams.

By failing to resist the tempting targets before them the burghers with their rapid fire stopped the slow-moving infantry in the centre from crossing the bridge, thus completely upsetting Botha's plan for their destruction. For the next hour Long's batteries duelled with the artillery on Fort Wylie while the British infantry kept a mile in the rear. Being within rifle range from over the river the gunners suffered casualties, Long being among those hit. Nevertheless, the British gunnery was so good that at the end of an hour the Boer batteries were silenced. By this time few shells remained. Pending the arrival of the ammunition wagons the gun crews moved to the shelter of a small donga about 50 yards back taking the wounded with them.

Hildyard's infantry brigade, which had been assigned the road bridge crossing, marched to the village of Colenso placing themselves between Long's guns and the bridge. Spread in wide formation they occupied the buildings and sheds. From there they kept up an effective fire across the river and forced the burghers out of the front-line trenches.

When Buller no longer heard the sound of Long's guns he decided that they had been put out of action by the enemy and stopped the ammunition wagons from going forward. When conflicting reports seemed to confirm his fears he began to plan the withdrawal of the batteries.

Watched with dismay and surprise by the gunners in the donga, two teams of volunteers tried to hitch up the guns. Since the inactivity of the batteries the Boer rate of fire had increased in intensity causing the gun teams to lose heavily in both men and horses. Notwithstanding their heroic efforts the attempt was called off. Only two of the guns were withdrawn. Lieutenant Frederick Roberts, only son of Lord Roberts, fell mortally wounded.

At 10 o'clock Buller began issuing orders for the withdrawal of the infantry brigades: Major-General G. Barton in support of Long's guns, General Hildyard from his position at Colenso village and Lieut-General N. G. Lyttelton whose assignment was in support of the Irish Brigade under Generals Hart and Hildyard. In the confusion of the battle the order to retire failed to reach every pocket of troops in and about the village. Small detachments of the Devonshire Regiment and the Irish and Scots Fusiliers assigned to escorting the guns taken forward by Long remained in the donga unaware of the general withdrawal. Later in the day after some resistance these men were taken prisoner along with some of the gunners. The guns abandoned by Buller stayed on the field all day undamaged, and with the breech blocks intact.

Captain Arthur Fitzpatrick, an Australian Special Service Officer on General Buller's Staff, was attached to Colonel Long and his gunners.

Captain Fitzpatrick gave his own account of the events of the morning: 'The staff rode out to the front ahead of the advancing batteries and reconnoitred and selected the position for the guns. Two hundred yards from the river we halted and scoured the hills with our glasses, without seeing any sign of the enemy. We believed they had trekked, and I might say that was the general belief. We were to be terribly and sadly deceived ere long.

'Having no cavalry escort we sent out two mounted patrols per battery to scour the low lying bushes this side of the river, 200 yards from where we had halted. They did, and returned having seen nothing. One man actually rode over the river by the footbridge. The range-taker took the range to Fort Wylie at 1,250 yards. The batteries galloped up to the position marked for them, and just as they were unlimbering the enemy opened on us a most terrific rifle and shell fire.

'Officers, men and horses were shot down in groups and teams, the two captains being killed at once. The scene was almost indescribable, riderless horses stampeding, wounded horses kicking and plunging, trying to free themselves. Wounded and dead men all around one. We were caught like rats in a trap. The rifle fire from the trenches 300 yards in front of us just over the river was most deadly. We had advanced so far into the semicircle that Hlangwane Hill was resting on our right flank and rear.

'The guns were run forward clear of the teams, and then took place one of the grandest sights that a human being could witness. The men fought like tigers till there wasn't a round of ammunition left. They smashed Fort Wylie into dust. The contempt of death shown by the officers is beyond my powers to describe. Before we abandoned the guns I was sent to bring up more ammunition. The attempt was a failure, because as soon as we started at a gallop over the veldt the Boers opened shell fire on us, and our limber was left a complete wreck.

'I was also told to find out why the naval guns were not in action. They were in our rear. They reported that oxen drawing their ammunition had stampeded. We could see them going across the field madly. The naval officer who had his horse shot asked me to try and bring them back. I gave chase and caught them up. The two European conductors had fled. The poor Kaffir drivers were panic-stricken. They could not be induced to return until I drew my revolver and threatened to shoot the leaders. By this means I managed to get them back, the Boers shelling us as we advanced.

'I then returned to the guns to hear the report that there were only two rounds of case ammunition left. These were fired off and reluctant permission was given to abandon the guns. We carried as many of the wounded as we could, and got into a donga on the left rear of the batteries. What a sad sight met one's eyes when one could look around. Eight officers (three wounded including Colonel Long and Colonel Hunt) and ten men all

wounded and I fear dead from want of medical attention, as we were clear of the guns by 7 a.m. and the medical men did not get to them till the battle was over after half-past five.'

General Dundonald on the extreme right flank had an effective force numbering only 800 recently enlisted colonial troopers supported by a field battery. This force had been given the task of attacking Hlangwane kopje. The brigade dismounted in the bed of a spruit about a mile south of the hill and plunged over ploughed mealie fields under rifle and pom-pom fire to the foot of the hill. Finding some shelter and assisted by the covering guns the colonials went some distance up the hillside. Then the supporting guns in the field battery were diverted towards Fort Wylie. At this stage the colonials could do no more than keep a firm fire going at the hill crest. Dundonald appealed to Barton on his left for the support of at least half a battalion of infantry. Barton however declined to depart in any way from his written orders to support the main infantry attack.

Captain Birdwood, then on Dundonald's staff, reported later: 'Had Barton seen his way to acceding to this request the whole course and fate of the campaign might have been altered. Had we succeeded in taking Hlangwane, there would have been no Spion Kop and no delay with the relief of Ladysmith.'²

At 11 a.m. Buller rode over to Hlangwane to order the withdrawal. The action in this sector cost nearly 100 casualties over a period of three hours.

John Maher, from Narrabri, New South Wales, who fought on Hlangwane with the Natal Carbineers described the events of the day: 'We failed to take the position (Colenso) and in doing so lost 1,000 men killed, wounded and missing. I saw it all, for our troops were in some hot places. It was an awful time. The other battles were child's play to this one. The Dutchmen fought like devils and always kept in the hills. It is not war. It is sheer murder. During the fight we lost 10 cannon. The Dutch hate the volunteers like poison, and they (the volunteers) have no love for the Boers.

'A young Australian chap, Peter Adie, joined up the same day as I did. The battle was the first time he was under fire. I think he was the first one to be shot. He was shot by a Dutchman within 200 yards of our lines. The Boer crawled up before two stones. I am pleased to say the beggar is there yet. He was shot over 20 times. I fired at him four times and a lot of others had a go at him. The Boers shot at us for over two hours. They were entrenched and under cover all day. No one but those who were in it can imagine the noise. I am thankful that I did not join the foot crowd. They got it properly all the time.'

Trooper Walter Wood, of Albury, New South Wales, wrote: 'I was in the battle of Colenso, and engaged with the enemy on our right flank,

² Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown*, p. 96.

being one of the gunners on a Maxim. It was the warmest quarter of an hour I have yet experienced. They shot men all round us, but somehow our Maxim gun escaped, although we were exposed to a severe cross fire. While we could not see the Boers, they spotted us. We had to shoot at some of them at 1,000 yards but those of them who shot our men were only 500 yards off, but could not be seen for the rocks. We were shooting from under a bush, and no sooner did the enemy spot where our gun was, than the air and bush became alive with hissing bullets. I can't understand how any of us came away.'

The *Natal Witness* gave an account of how Lieutenant W. R. Ponsonby, of 'D' Squadron, Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry attempted to carry in a wounded man. Ponsonby arrived in South Africa after the battle of Elandslaagte. He was formerly a policeman at Pilliga, New South Wales. Lieutenant Ponsonby was later mentioned in despatches by Lord Roberts:

'Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry also provided a hero in the person of Lieutenant Ponsonby of "D" Troop who when his section was recalled remained behind with a wounded man, whose wounds he dressed. Then he tried to carry the man to safety. While so engaged his helmet was pierced by a bullet. But he stuck to his task, and walked forward with his burden. The injured man's life, however, was cut short, as while being carried a bullet lodged in his stomach, causing his almost instant death. The dying man's movements when writhing on the ground, drew fresh fire, and Ponsonby sought shelter for a short time. He then pushed on receiving a flesh wound on the left arm, while his coat was perforated. Noticing his condition, a Boer advanced to 80 yards to make sure of his victim, but Ponsonby drew a revolver and shot him dead. When he returned to camp he received a well-merited ovation from his friends.'

General Sir Redvers Buller, who rode slowly around the battle front all morning showing little regard for his personal safety, withdrew his army completely. With the exception of scattered groups over the wide battlefield all the troops were in the process of retiring by noon. Buller estimated that he was opposed by something like 15,000 Boers.

By 4 o'clock the brigades were out of range. After the big naval guns in the rear stopped firing and were withdrawn the Boers crossed the road bridge about 5 o'clock with teams to get the ten guns and the ammunition wagons left behind by the British. Without interference of any kind they hitched up the guns and wagons removing them across the river. Distant onlookers at this amazing scene were the gunners near Hlangwane kopje who prepared to give the confident Boers a few salvoes for their audacity until the appearance of parties of the Ambulance Corps on the field just as the burghers limbered up put an end to the idea.

The British casualties totalled 1,106 in killed, wounded or missing while those of the Boers were probably not more than 50. On a long summer's

day described as blazing hot most of the wounded were also burnt, blistered and parched from long exposure on the open veldt.

Something less than half of the British force had come under fire but for those who did it was severe. Scarcely a soldier in the entire force other than the colonials on Hlangwane saw a burgher so well were they covered. General Buller afterwards placed most of the blame for the disastrous day on the shoulders of Colonel Long. He believed that the loss of the guns occurred because they were taken too close to Fort Wylie thus coming within effective rifle range. But years later Louis Botha said that Long's guns by running up at such close range were largely responsible for the breakdown of his orders that the Boer fire should be held until the infantry crossed the bridge. Had he been obeyed the British would have suffered an even greater disaster.

Private J. Baptist, from New South Wales, serving with 'B' Company, 2nd Devonshire Regiment, wrote to a relative in Sydney: 'Chieveley Camp. Colenso. 5 January, 1900. On 15 December we had a very nice day. We fell in at half past four in the morning and marched to a place called Tugela, just below the hills. In these hills were about 15,000 or 20,000 Boers. Well we advanced to within 400 yards of them, but we could see nothing of them. Suddenly they opened such concentrated fire on us that I don't know how a man escaped. We had no shelter and could not fire on account of their being in trenches. We could not give them a charge of bayonets on account of the Tugela River, which is 200 yards wide and the bridge was blown up, so we had to retire. We lost in our own regiment alone 134 killed wounded and missing. That was only one regiment out of 22. The bullets fell around us like hail. I have never seen the like of it before, nor has anyone else that is here and we don't want to see it again.'

Trooper Himmelhoch, a South African Light Horseman, commented in a letter to his mother in Sydney: 'I do not think they will ever take Colenso from this side, but will only shift them from a flank movement.'

Following the defeat General Buller sent a message to Lieut-General Sir George White in Ladysmith to the effect that he did not expect to relieve the town for at least another month. He suggested that White should burn all his papers and destroy the guns and munitions before making the best terms he could with the enemy. To this White responded by issuing a proclamation that the defence would be continued 'in the same spirited manner as it has hitherto been conducted until the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief in South Africa does relieve it'.³

Buller also telegraphed the War Office in London that he proposed to withdraw to Chieveley to establish himself there in a defensive position and give up any attempt to relieve Ladysmith. From London he was

promptly directed to either maintain the effort to relieve Ladysmith or hand over the command to one of his brigade commanders and return home. Later in the day the Government in London sent for Lord Roberts. Almost at the same time as he heard of the death of his only son, Field Marshal Lord Roberts was appointed Commander-in-Chief in South Africa, with Major-General H. H. Kitchener as his Chief of Staff.

British arms had now suffered three defeats on as many fronts in the space of the week that became known as 'Black Week'. They happened soon after Sir Alfred Milner had reported to the Colonial Secretary: 'The enemy were more numerous, far better armed as regards artillery and much better organized than we had any idea of. As you know, I have long been in alarm at their enormous military power, and the steady development of it. But my gloomy view of their power has been surpassed by the reality. No one, for instance, anticipated for a moment that our field artillery would be overpowered by their bringing heavy guns from Johannesburg and Pretoria.'⁴

In England the military defeats only strengthened the resolve of the Government to carry on the war. In a speech at Chatham, Lord Rosebery, the leader of the Liberal Party and a former Prime Minister, said that the country was willing to expend 'the last shilling and the last man' in bringing about the defeat of the Boers. The Natal defeat took place a few days after the defeat in the west at Magersfontein. Only a day before Magersfontein British infantry suffered defeat and were forced to retreat at Stormberg Junction on the weakly held Central Front of the Cape Colony.

When Major-General Sir William Gatacre, commanding the 3rd Infantry Division, disembarked at East London on 16 November, General Buller gave him a small force with which to conduct a holding operation on the Central Front. Early in December Gatacre decided to recapture the forward railway junction at Stormberg, which the British had evacuated on 26 November.

On the afternoon of 9 December troops and guns left Putter's Kraal by train heading north for Molteno, to the south of Stormberg Junction. After only a few hours rest the soldiers set out at 9.15 p.m. the same evening to march 10 miles. The men were scheduled to complete the march in time to give them two hours rest before dawn when the assault on the hills overlooking the pass traversed by the railway and the road entering Stormberg Junction was timed to begin.

Although guided by local men reputed to know every yard of the road the column missed the way in the pitch dark. The tiring troops blundered on uncertain of their exact location until they were discovered by a Boer picket which raised the alarm. The element of surprise was lost and the

³ L. S. Amery (ed.), *The Times History of the War in South Africa*, Vol 2, p. 463.

⁴ C. Headlam (ed.), *The Milner Papers*, Vol 2, p. 25.

column was fully exposed in front of a line of kopjes when the enemy opened fire just as the dawn broke.

At 4.15 a.m. the infantry went into action across the open veldt facing heavy rifle fire. The advance made in extended order came to a halt in the rugged kloofs in the line of kopjes. In this situation the soldiers were caught in the short range of their own artillery. With no reserves to follow the failure of the initial attack, Gatacre ordered a withdrawal.

The retreat began at 5.30 a.m. by men already worn out by the journey in the open trucks and the long night of marching followed by the fighting. Although coming under shell fire for the first few miles the retreat to Molteno took place in good order but the absence of water-carts resulted in the troops suffering from thirst long before the march ended. Meanwhile 600 men cut off and left on the kopje at Stormberg in the general retreat had become prisoners. The casualties amounted to 89 killed and wounded. In officially censuring General Gatacre the Stormberg disaster was described by Lord Roberts as a rash advance on a Boer position, and the failure mainly due 'to the reliance on inaccurate information and to the employment of too small a force, tired by the train journey and the subsequent march'.⁵

Mr G. Mullen of Nowra received a letter from his brother serving with Gatacre's column: 'You will probably have seen an account of the battle of Rooi Kop (or Red Hill) at Stormberg railway station by General Gatacre at 8 p.m. on Saturday 9 December and the next day, the battle raging until 11 a.m. Our column consisted of mounted men and infantry supported by artillery of the 94th and 17th Batteries which fire 15-pounder guns. There were also five Maxims and two Nordenfeldt guns.

'General Gatacre is a good leader and carries eight medals . . . He acts on the battlefield as he would on a review, but I am sorry to say, the first battle of our column ended in our having to retreat.

'Of the casualties on our side, there were 25 killed and wounded, and a large body of Northumberland Fusiliers who were fighting side by side with us were taken prisoners. They tried to rush a position on a hill and the Dutch surrounded them and cut them off. Immediately after this the General ordered us to retreat which we did, while our artillery paused to pour shells into the Boer positions as we went.

'The Dutch column which had an excellent position on a mountain must have numbered 3,000. Our column was 2,000 strong. The Dutch seemed to have about 10 guns, and they must have been 15-pounders, or even the large German guns. Our men are pretty sure that the Boers' artillery men were all German regulars.'

⁵ *South Africa Despatches*, 6 February 1900-23 June 1902. (Library of New South Wales number Q355.4868.)

CHAPTER 7

Australians in action on the Central Front

Major-General John French escaped from Ladysmith with his Staff Officer, Major Douglas Haig, on the last train to leave and reported to the Commander-in-Chief at Cape Town. General Sir Redvers Buller gave him a small force with which to check the enemy on the Central Front, a similar assignment to that held by Gatacre. The task was to protect the railway system radiating from the southern seaports, thus preventing a deeper thrust into the Cape Colony.

On 20 November 1899 General French arrived at the railway centre of Naauwpoort Junction. His force at this stage consisted of infantry and mounted troops including a New South Wales Lancer detachment under Captain Cox, the Australian Horse and the New Zealand Mounted Rifles. Scouting and working together the Australians and New Zealanders attacked farmhouses sheltering armed burghers. French soon moved the squadrons forward along the railway establishing himself at Arundel, 20 miles from the Free State border marked by the Orange River.

In the weeks ahead the force was strengthened by the arrival of the Australians from the Kimberley Relief Force. After weeks of duty along Methuen's line of communications the infantry contingents from New

South Wales and Victoria were converted into mounted infantry, a move to help overcome the extreme need for more mounted troops. The arrival of 'The Fighting 28' freed from service with the Relief Force, meant that the New South Wales Lancers could operate as a single unit for the first time since their arrival at the Cape.

To hold the line French had to contend with commandos more numerous than his own force. At first by skirmishing east and west of Arundel the commandos attempted flanking movements by trying to cut in behind French to the railway. With the skilful use of his mounted troops French prevented this, forcing the enemy to retire to the north.

Based on broken and hilly country south of the Orange River the Boer front beginning north-west of Colesberg extended well away to the south-east of the town. W. J. Lambie described the country as 'flat with small plains of about 5 miles width, surrounded by broken chains of hills, called kopjes; these kopjes are low masses of broken rocks, with little or no vegetation. The Boers are in all the kopjes which give them splendid cover.'

Not being able to afford heavy losses French declined to deliver frontal attacks against strongly held positions. At the end of the month by constant patrolling interspersed with minor engagements and vigorous shelling of Boer positions he had succeeded in stationing his forces along the front, spread over a distance of 30 miles. About this time Lambie wrote: 'The work of the Australians has been chiefly reconnoitring—going out in small bodies, to draw the fire of the enemy and so locate them.'

In the early hours of 2 January 1900 the Boers uncoupled 32 trucks at the railway siding near the British camp at Rensburg. The trucks ran down a long incline for about 5 miles in the direction of Colesberg before coming to a halt at Plewman near the Boer position. The Boers had blown up part of the track and some of the trucks were derailed. A detachment of New South Wales Lancers and Australian Horse under Captain Cox was called out at 2.30 a.m. to go after the trucks which were loaded with stores. An engine also steamed down the line to bring the trucks back to Rensburg.

When the troops approached close to the trucks they rode up to an embankment close to the railway. Dismounting and leaving the horses the men headed for the trucks across open ground. The Boers opened fire from a kopje. As they blazed away the men were held up by a tightly tensioned wire fence. A young trumpeter in the Australian Horse, C. A. Gilchrist, a son of the Mayor of the Sydney suburb of Willoughby, who enlisted from Gundagai, explained: 'On reaching the railway fence my water-bottle and belt got caught in the wire, and it took a minute or so to free myself, the shots falling around me.'

The Australians could do no more than crouch beside and under the trucks. Trooper Norman Priddle of the Australian Horse received a wound

above the eye. Others were slightly wounded before the order came to retire to the cover of the embankment. For the remainder of the day the men had good cover while the shells burst on the embankment and flying shrapnel passed harmlessly over the heads of the horses. The cover of darkness allowed the Australians to escape. The damaged trucks and stores were left to the Boers.

Captain Cox later served in the campaign with the Third New South Wales Mounted Rifles with the rank of Major. While on active service on 29 June 1902 Lieut-Colonel Cox was mentioned in despatches. In the 1914-18 war he served at Gallipoli and in Palestine as a Brigadier-General becoming known to the troops as "Fighting Charlie Cox".

With the forward base on the railway firmly established at Rensburg siding the scattered forces radiated from Maeder's Farm in the north-west to Slingersfontein Farm in the south-east. A detachment of the Field Telegraph Division formed the link in the communications that played a big part in the security of the whole front.

In the first week in January engineers successfully hauled guns to the summit of Coleskop, a steep cone-shaped 800-foot mountain. From there the guns dominated the landscape to the west of Colesburg but the gunners refrained from shelling the town because of the presence of many British residents and refugees.

French suffered his only reverse when a night attack on a kopje was repulsed with severe losses. Although only a few hours passed between the briefing and the actual operation the burghers, forewarned, were ready and waiting. For in truth, even though the district was British territory the majority of the farmers were Republican sympathisers. Consequently informers were numerous.

By occupying Slingersfontein Farm the British gained an advanced position 10 miles east of the railway at Rensburg. While at Rensburg all drinking water had to come by rail, at Slingersfontein the camp lay next to a good water supply from a nearby spruit. It was close to a long, high kopje running north and south and commanding the nearby countryside.

Trooper J. S. Dooley, New South Wales Lancers, described the camp as 'the best place we have struck so far, as there is plenty of water. At a farmhouse there is a splendid orchard from which we have obtained peaches and pears.' Trumpeter Gilchrist described the camp food: 'We get bread and coffee for breakfast, meat for dinner, and bread and tea for supper.' But he also admitted that 'yesterday I got into an orchard and had a feed of mulberries. The peaches gave me a pain under my pinny.'

Based not more than four miles distant the Boers were not slow to react to the encroachment on their perimeter. On the morning of 15 January 1900 a company of 120 men from the Yorkshire Regiment occupied sangars on the

extreme northern end of Slingersfontein kopje. About 60 men of the New Zealand Mounted Rifles under Captain Maddocks held a position to the east of the British infantrymen. General De la Rey directed a strong frontal attack on the position held by the British infantry. The soldiers were pushed out of the front line sangar and most of the officers were killed.

De la Rey and his ZARP commando were about to gain complete control when Captain Maddocks saved the day by sending out two flanking parties. One party moved along the eastern slope of the hill while the other traversed the western slope. Threading their way past the rocks and through low bushy scrub spread over the kopje the New Zealanders were in time to stem the Boer advance and occupy the sangar that the British had earlier lost, thus confining the Boers to the extreme point of the hill.

On the order from Captain Maddocks the New Zealanders fixed bayonets and dashed down the hillside into a heavy rifle fire. Sergeant Gourley and Trooper Connell were killed as they sprang from the sangar. The burghers turned and retired in confusion with more than 20 of their number left lying on the side of the kopje. The two New Zealanders killed were buried on the slope behind the camp. From that day the British called the kopje 'New Zealand Hill'.

Before dawn the next morning a mixed patrol of New South Wales Lancers and Australian Horse left Slingersfontein camp to reconnoitre within the enemy lines taking a northerly route towards Norval's Pont on the Orange River. After a few miles the patrol split up. A party under Lieutenant R. M. Heron, New South Wales Lancers, stopped at Norval's Farm where some enquiries were made. Before the patrol left the locality it took the precaution of posting a sentry on a ridge overlooking the back of the farm. When the scout rejoined the patrol he reported that a number of Boers had openly approached the farmhouse. The patrol returned to camp at 1 p.m. carefully riding wide and out of range of the farm.

All went well with the other half of the patrol of 20 men under Lieutenant W. V. Dowling, Australian Horse, until on the return journey in the afternoon after stopping to examine a farmhouse only 5 miles from the camp. After being well received by the Boer family at the house the patrol rode down an open plain towards a line of hills. They were then so close to the camp that the patrol seemed on the point of reaching a successful conclusion.

Suddenly from scattered kopjes on the plain 100 Boers appeared riding at full gallop firing as they came. The commando had waited all day near Norval's Farm for Lieutenant Heron's patrol to return, but failed to detect it passing in the distance. Completely surprised and outnumbered by four to one the Australians although covered on every flank made for a kopje about 250 yards off. Several horses were shot and fell but the riders were instantly picked up behind a mate. When Trooper H. A. Artlett's horse was shot he

got up behind Lieutenant Dowling. That horse was also shot and Artlett fell to the ground stunned. Others blocked by tightly drawn fences with six strands of heavy wire with barbed wire on top were held up and either shot by the Mausers or taken prisoner. But for the fences they may have escaped.

In the end six troopers reached camp either by galloping clear, by hiding in the low bushes near the rocks or by making their way back on foot. When Artlett recovered consciousness he could hear the Boers talking. He took off his boots and got past them to hide in some bushes until nightfall. Artlett walked into camp at 11 p.m.

Determined not to be taken alive Lieutenant Dowling fought gallantly until, weakened by wounds and injuries, he lost consciousness. Sergeant-Major G. A. Griffen was shot dead. (He was the first New South Wales soldier to lose his life in the war. A plaque to his memory may still be seen in the Sydney Town Hall.) When Corporal F. I. Kilpatrick lay mortally wounded, the burghers bandaged him up as best they could leaving him where he had fallen near the base of the kopje.

At daylight the next morning A. B. ('Banjo') Paterson, the Australian poet and correspondent, rode with Lieutenant Heron and a patrol accompanied by an ambulance to the scene of the ambush. They found Griffen and buried him at the foot of the kopje just where he fell. Guided by a flock of vultures awaiting his death they came upon Corporal Kilpatrick. Unable to change his position he did his best to attract the party by moving one leg. He indicated his thirst by tapping a water-bottle but was unable to swallow. Trooper Ashley Whitney, a New South Wales Lancer with the patrol, said that while alone in his suffering on the kopje overnight the wounded man had scratched with a small stone on the rock against which he had fallen, two words: 'Its cold.' Kilpatrick had fired 43 rounds from his bandolier. He died of his wounds in the ambulance. On the way back the ambulance picked up Trooper W. H. Brady, a New South Wales Lancer, who had hidden on a kopje overnight.

In civil life Kilpatrick had taught at the Carlingford Public School near Sydney. He obtained leave of absence to go with the Lancers to Aldershot. In the class-room at Carlingford the pupils and his friends placed a fine memorial which to this day makes succeeding classes aware of the sacrifice made by the young teacher of other days — a volunteer soldier who fell on the battlefield. The New Zealanders and New South Welshmen attended his burial at Slingersfontein Farm next to the New Zealanders who had fallen two days before.

There were many vacant places when the 3rd Lancer troop paraded with the Australian Horse in camp on the morning of 17 January. Trooper A. W. Blencowe wrote: 'The line that had previously flashed with brilliant jokes and Aldershot choruses, turned out to attend their broken line on the 17th,

with marred countenances and silent lips — 11 horses where previously there had been 24.'

'Banjo' Paterson visited the farm near the scene of the fight. The Boer family consisted of the farmer, his wife and 'a crowd of half-grown girls, one of whom could speak English'. Paterson felt that the farmer and his family were probably aware of the planned ambush when the patrol called at the farm. Furthermore they may have seen the whole thing from the kopje at the back of the farm, yet he was told by the young girl that when they heard the shooting they 'thought it was someone shooting buck'.

The Australian war correspondent, Hales, was given an account of the ambush by a burgher, a fellow patient when Hales was in the Boer hospital at Bloemfontein. The man said the burghers were disappointed with the size of the Australian patrol. They had expected something bigger. Nevertheless the Australians were fairly ambushed and did not suspect a thing until the bullets began to fly.

'Dowling's horse went down with a bullet between the flap of the saddle and the crease of the shoulder and the little chap went spinning over his head among the rocks. He was up in a moment yelling to his men to ride for their lives. We charged from cover and rode down on the men who had fallen and as we closed in on them your countryman lifted his rifle and loosed on us. One of our fellows took a flying shot at him at close quarters, for his rifle was talking the language of death and that is a tongue no man likes to listen to.

'The bit of lead took him in the eye and came out by his ear, and down he went. But he climbed up in a moment and his rifle was going to his shoulder again when I fired to break his arm and carried his thumb away — the thumb of the right hand I think. The rifle clattered on the rocks but as we drew round him he pulled his revolver with his one good hand and started to pot us. He looked like a gamecock as he stood in the sunlight, his face all bathed in blood and his shattered hand hanging numbed behind him. So we gave him a couple in the legs and down by his dead horse he went; but even then he was as eager for fight as a grass widow is for compliments and it was not until Jan Viljoen jammed the butt of his rifle on the crown of his head that he stretched himself out and took no further part in that circus.'

Well treated and attended by a German doctor in the Volks Hospital at Bloemfontein until the town was taken by the advancing British, Dowling recovered enough to return to Australia.

In the camp the first news of the ambush came from Trooper James Bucholtz who rode in at about 3 p.m. with his horse lame and shot in the jaw. Bucholtz was on the left flank of the patrol and got clear away by finding an opening through a wire fence to ride about five miles into camp.

¹ A. G. Hales, *Campaign Pictures of the War in South Africa*, p. 141.

Trooper Edward Thomas from Mudgee, who also escaped from the ambush, told his own story: 'We had been out all day since 3 o'clock in the morning and were making home about 2 o'clock. We had just left a farmhouse about half a mile, and were in open country near the top end of a kopje, when suddenly from a kopje about 500 yards on our right flank a mob of Boers dashed out at us. I should say about twice as many as we were. Warrant Officer Charles Fisher gave us the order to retire to a kopje on our left and open fire. It was not more than 200 or 300 yards from us. We galloped over to the kopje. There was no sense in staying in the open as the Boers were in the kopje which commanded us.

'We rode over and some of the rearguard were dismounted by their horses being shot, but were then taken up by the others. As soon as we reached the kopje we were making for, we dismounted and opened fire on the mounted Boers. Immediately heavy fire was opened from kopjes all round, and in fact from the very kopje we were on.

'Fisher said, "Mount again, we are surrounded." We remounted and rode towards the camp up the sides of the kopjes until we met a wire fence. We galloped along it, heavy fire being poured in all the time. Several horses fell. Griffen and I found a gap in the fence, it was a place where the wire ended and a low stone wall took its place. We got through the gap and Griffen said to me, "There are two Boers down there by themselves," pointing down the hill. We rode in that direction and were met by a storm of bullets.

'There were about 40 Boers there. Griffen fell dead. My horse was shot down and rolled on me, leaving me half stunned. The Boers must have thought I was dead, so I had time to recover and crawl into some bushes. From my place of concealment in the bushes nothing could be seen of our men, although I watched the Boers come up to my dead horse. When they did not see me there they began to look around for me and fired some shots into the bushes. Several of the bullets came within a few feet of me.

'Some time after they had gone I came out of hiding and started on the road back to camp. Because of the injury caused by my horse falling on me, any movement was made only with the greatest difficulty, so progress was slow. At about 9 o'clock that night I saw four horsemen coming straight towards me. To make certain of avoiding them I crawled behind some rocks and being by this time utterly exhausted I simply slumped down and slept. The next morning the Lancer patrol picked me up.'

At the end of January Lord Roberts recalled General French to Cape Town. In the process of planning his coming campaign Roberts decided he must withdraw as many mounted troops from the Colesberg area as he possibly could. The task of holding the front with reduced forces fell to Major-General R. A. P. Clements. At first General De la Rey remained un-

aware of the changed nature of the weakened columns opposed to him but in the second week in February he launched determined attacks on the British flanks.

On 9 February an Australian patrol left the Rensburg base at dawn riding south. The party was a mixed one of 30 Victorians and 18 Tasmanians. Hales, the Western Australian journalist representing the London *Daily News*, and the correspondent of the Melbourne *Age*, Lambie, accompanied the patrol. The objective was to ascertain Boer strength in the area south of Rensburg.

After four hours riding and 12 miles covered they found themselves in a basin completely surrounded by kopjes. Scouts came galloping back with the information that the enemy were in the kopjes ahead. The patrol split up into two parties the Tasmanians going ahead, the Victorians acting in support.

The journalists decided to ride with the advance party. After 2 miles without seeing any Boers the pair drew bridle and dropped back several hundred yards behind the troops to confer. Suddenly they found themselves surrounded by a party of about 40 horsemen who emerged from the nearby kopjes. Ignoring the shouts to surrender the two men tried to ride clear. Almost immediately Lambie fell shot through the head. His companion rode wildly on somehow surviving the shooting from only 70 yards before falling from his horse when a bullet creased his temple. Hales afterwards said that when he regained consciousness he found himself in a Boer laager 'surrounded by a lot of armed men, very rough in appearance but exceedingly kind'. The burghers carried him to a shady spot, dried his face and carefully bound up the wounded temple.

The Boer leader told Hales that he and his companion had no one to blame but themselves. 'You ride out with a fighting party,' he said, 'and you try to ride off at a gallop under the very muzzles of our rifles when we tell you to surrender.'² Both men were dressed in the khaki-type suit worn by correspondents.

On the following day acting under instructions, Lieutenant F. B. Heritage — First Tasmanian Contingent — approached the Boer lines under a white flag seeking information about the missing journalists. A few hours later on re-entering his own lines Heritage was fired on by an English picket. He handed over to Captain Cyril St C. Cameron (the Tasmanian officer in command) Lambie's watch and other small possessions, including a photo of his wife, returned by General De la Rey. Lieutenant Heritage also brought a message from De la Rey offering Captain Cameron safe conduct to the spot where Lambie was buried.

When Captain Cameron and Major W. T. Reay, the correspondent of the Melbourne *Herald*, entered the Boer lines they were met and blindfolded by

a young Boer and a big German. De la Rey received them with great courtesy and led them to the place where Lambie fell near the farm named Jasfontein. They were shown his grave on the veldt at a spot where no suitable stone could be found to mark the place.

One of the ablest journalists in Victoria, W. J. Lambie was regarded as the senior military reporter in Australia. He had accompanied the New South Wales Contingent to the Sudan in 1885, and was wounded in the leg when ambushed by Arabs. When the army occupied Colesberg not many weeks after his death a small white marble headstone was placed on the veldt to mark the resting place of 'W. J. Lambie of the Melbourne *Age*'. Due to the kindness of a Boer family, the grave was cared for over the years. In more recent years the grave and the stone were moved to the British Military Cemetery in Colesberg.

The Boers took 'Smiler' Hales to the Volks Hospital in Bloemfontein. He was released when the army captured the town.

After the two correspondents had dropped back the patrol rode on hard in small scattered parties across the veldt in full retreat to a sheltering kopje with the Boers at their heels. In an hour or so the enemy began to work around to the rear. In the very best Boer manner the colonials returned to their horses and galloped back to the next kopje. By repeating the tactics the Australians succeeded in reaching the camp though not without losses. Troopers Atherley Gilham and Alfred Button were killed and four others taken prisoner.

Trooper V. S. Peers, who had enlisted from the mining town of Zeehan in Tasmania, fought his way back to camp. When he was stopped by a wire fence his horse was shot from under him by Boers coming up not far behind. With the bullets flying around Peers made a dash for the rocky side of a kopje. He was soon followed up the kopje by two Boers. In a close fight amid the rocks Peers shot them both. He then went looking for the Boers' horses. Suddenly he came face to face with a third Boer. Both men fired simultaneously. The Boer fell severely wounded and Peers received a grazing wound on the neck. Almost immediately he shot dead a fourth Boer near a low bush. Although forced to lie low for long intervals because of the enemy in the vicinity Peers trudged on slowly through the night, walking more than 5 miles. He finally reached camp at 3 a.m. in a weakened condition from the effects of his wound.

On the afternoon of 9 February a patrol made up of Inniskilling Dragoons and more than 20 West Australians, led by Major H. G. Moor, went on reconnaissance 3 miles east of Slingersfontein. They found the enemy preparing gun positions from which to shell the camp. From nearby kopjes 400 Boers opened up a hot fire. The Dragoons got clean away. The Australians retired to an isolated kopje keeping up the fight until nightfall.

² *Campaign Pictures of the War in South Africa.*

Weeks later in the hospital at Bloemfontein a young burgher who took part in the attack on the West Australians gave Hales his account of what happened that afternoon. He said:

'There were about 400 of us, all picked men. When the commandant called us to go and take the kopje we sprang up eagerly, and dashed over some hills to cross the gully and charged up the kopje where those 20 men were waiting for us. But we did not know the Australians then. We know them now.

'Scarcely had we risen to our feet when they loosed their rifles on us and not a shot was wasted. They did not fire on us as regular soldiers nearly always do—volley after volley straight in front of them—but everyone picked his man and shot to kill. They fired like lightning never dwelling on the trigger yet never wasting lead. All around us our boldest and best dropped until we could not face them. We dropped to cover and tried to pick them off, but they were cool and watchful throwing away no chance.

'We tried to crawl from rock to rock to hem them in but holding their fire until our burghers moved they plugged us with lead. Then once again we tried to rush the hill and once again they drove us back though our guns were playing on the heights they held. We could not face the fire. They did not play wild music. They only clung close as climbing weeds to the rocks and shot as we never saw men shoot before.

'Then we got ready to sweep the hill with guns but our Commandant, admiring those brave few who would not budge in spite of our numbers, sent an officer to ask them to surrender promising them all the honours of war. But they sent us word to come and take them if we could.

'We shelled them all along their scattered line and tried to rush them under the cover of the artillery fire, but they only held their posts with stouter hearts and shot the straighter. When the fire was the hottest we could do nothing but lie there and swear at them though we admired their stubborn pluck. They held the hill till dark and then dashed down the other side. They jumped into their saddles and made off carrying their wounded with them. They were but 20 and we were 400.'³

One of the West Australians, Lieutenant G. G. W. Hensman, was mortally wounded and lingered on for a month in the hospital at Rondebosch near Cape Town. On the kopje Trooper Alexander Krygger gamely went to his assistance. Taking whatever cover he could, he threaded a safe passage through the rocks for 40 yards to Hensman's side. Within a few minutes he was joined by Corporal Michael Conway. Together they began to make the wounded man as comfortable as possible. Three times Conway carried a helmet with soil to place under Hensman's hips as he lay on the rocks. When on his way with a fourth helmet of soil Conway was shot in the head and died instantly.

³ *Campaign Pictures of the War in South Africa.*

With the bullets coming from a range of 300 yards Krygger bound Hensman's wound as well as he could, cutting his breeches to apply a field dressing. Krygger then worked to build a rock sangar to protect the wounded man. He also broke twigs from a bush and arranged them to keep off the sun, stopping now and then to take up Conway's rifle which he used to good effect by shooting three Boers.

Under the cover of darkness Krygger guided the ambulance to the scene of the action. The Medical Corps buried Conway at the foot of the kopje under a wooden cross. They were drawn to the spot on the kopje where Hensman lay by the sound of his delirious cries for water as he had lain out for hours in the heat and the cold. Trooper Krygger was later mentioned in despatches.

On the following day the West Australians paraded before General Clements. They received praise for gallantry in the general orders of the day:

'The General Officer Commanding wishes to place on record his high admiration of the courage and determination shown by a party of 20 men of the West Australians under Captain Moor. By their determined stand against 300 or 400 men they entirely frustrated the enemy's attempt to turn the flank of the position.'⁴

Meanwhile the Boers with 1,500 to 2,000 men under Commandant Grobler increased the pressure on the British left flank north-west of Colesberg. On 10 February outposts were attacked at Bastard's Nek and Windmill Camp with the result that the whole line fell back to Hobkirk's Farm. In this operation two Victorians were killed. Sergeant Neil Grant died from bullet wounds in the chest. Trooper A. H. Willson, quick to go to his aid, was killed instantly as he bent over the wounded man.

Grant was shot by a young boy using a sporting rifle, the weight of the Mauser being too much for him. The second shot came from the boy's father who shot Willson in the head. Within full view of the parent a Dragoon then shot the son dead. The immediate reaction of grief and dismay of the father caused him to bound from cover to his feet completely oblivious to his danger. In a matter of seconds he fell riddled with bullets from every Lee Metford levelled at him.

At dawn on 12 February the force at Hobkirk's Farm took up a defensive position on a low rocky ridge known as Pink Hill, immediately to the south of the farm. On this particular morning half the mixed force of 200 men were Inniskilling Dragoons and infantrymen from the Wiltshire Regiment. The others were Victorians, South Australians and Tasmanians. The leader of the First Victorian Contingent, Major G. A. Eddy, commanded the whole force.

⁴ J. Stirling, *The Colonials in South Africa, 1899-1902*, p. 466.

Under increasing pressure from the Boers operating with three Maxim guns and a field gun from close range the men on the ridge held out until 11 a.m. By this time the rifle and gun fire was so severe that Eddy ordered a general retirement towards Maeder's Farm.

The troopers scrambled back to their horses but the Wiltshire infantry were in a tight corner. A detachment of colonials stayed with Major Eddy to hold the ridge, covering the retirement of the Wilts being taken up behind the troopers and galloping beyond range. Trooper G. F. Veall, a Victorian, rode out three times bringing out a man on each of the first two occasions. On the third trip he carried two men, one up in front and one behind. In a Special Order of the Day, General Clements stated: 'The assistance rendered to their dismounted comrades of the Wiltshire Regiment by the Victorian Rifles is deserving of the highest praise.'

The events on the ridge where the defenders were being sorely pressed are well summarised in the following account: 'The main credit for the defence of Pink Hill belongs to the Australians who inspired by the gallantry of their commander hung on to the very last, most heroically covering the withdrawal of the infantry. Their losses amounted to nearly 40 per cent of their strength. Of their five officers, Eddy and two others were killed, the remaining two severely wounded. As an exhibition of resolute courage on the part of comparatively untrained troops this performance by the Australians is well worthy of mention.'

Captain W. F. Hopkins of the Victorian Medical Staff said: 'I had previously seen Major Eddy when he made his last stand, covering the retirement of the Wilts Infantry. He had apparently, after giving the order to retire, waited till the men near him were ready to get away, and then while rising from the recumbent position from which he had been firing, received a bullet through the brain. He could only have moved slightly, and death was instantaneous. Every man in action behaved splendidly that day and none more so than our commanding officer, who died a true soldier's death after a fight in a very difficult position, from which he got away every man possible. In another few seconds he might have got away safely after his men. The Wilts could not speak too highly of the way he behaved after he had said: "The Wilts are in a tight corner and we are going to cut them out." He called on a few men to accompany him on a ridge, and it was there we found him after the fight was over.'

The delaying action prevented the enemy from taking Pink Hill until 3 p.m., this being the limit of their advance that day. By this time General Clements realised that the wide front that had been held by General French could no longer be defended with his reduced columns. Therefore he

quickly called in the long flanks at Maeder's Farm and Coleskop and from Slingsfontein to the base on the railway at Rensburg.

The reaction of the soldiers in the field to these manoeuvres is recorded by Trooper Thomas Eyres, a Victorian, after the retreat from Pink Hill. He wrote: 'We reached Maeder's about 6 p.m., where we had our tea and half an hour's sleep. At midnight we started for Rensburg arriving at day-break, had breakfast, pitched tents and had a couple of hours sleep. We left again for Arundel just after midnight.'

Captain R. W. Salmon, another Victorian, reported: 'The odds are fearful, they are just like rabbits on the kopjes. We fully expect to be cut off and locked up, like they are in Ladysmith. We are going to see it through so don't worry about me. It seems a terrible thing to think about British troops having to give in after fighting so long to gain a place, but we will be even with them yet.'

After days of marching and fighting the troops had barely taken up new defensive positions near Rensburg before they were moved off down the line in the darkness of the early morning of 14 February, arriving at Arundel later that day after a withdrawal of 30 miles. Along a fresh front of 20 miles they prepared for a renewal of the attacks by establishing more favourable defence positions than at Rensburg. The commandos were also anxious to make further advances into the Cape Colony and skirmishes were frequent. Every day patrols were out scanning the veldt.

Trooper Colin Jones of Mudgee related in a letter how a scouting party rode its way out of trouble: 'Four scouts from our company were surprised by a dozen Boers yesterday and they had to gallop for their lives. They found they were in a kind of a trap, and the only way out of it was by putting their horses at three barbed-wire fences, of five wires each—all barbed. There was no help for it and at them they went with the bullets whistling all round them to urge them on. Two of the horses fell at the first fence, but the riders mounted again, and were soon on the track of the two that had got safely over. Just before reaching the second fence one of the horses received a bullet through the shoulders and came down. It struggled to its feet again, however, and blundered through the fence somehow, with its rider Lance-Corporal Bill Gribble. But after going for another 30 yards or so it fell for the last time.'

'By this time the rearmost man of the other three, a chum of mine named Bill Fisher from near Orange, was some 70 yards ahead. Corporal Gribble gave a shout when his horse fell a second time and Fisher, seeing his plight very pluckily went back for him, the Boers who by this time had galloped well within range firing at them all the time. The Corporal mounted behind Fisher and the horse raced at the last fence with its double burden. It cleared the fence in great style and after a further gallop of a couple of miles the party pulled up in safety, not one of them being hit.'

¹ Stirling, *The Colonials in South Africa, 1899-1902*, p. 466.

'Everything on the horse that was shot, except the rifle and saddle, of course fell to the Boers. Bridle, overcoat and blanket, besides several articles in the saddle wallets. I suppose the Boers thought that the fences would stop our chaps. They must have opened their eyes when they saw them race for the fences, especially the last two. I think some of us can show them a wrinkle or two in riding anyhow.'

The hazards of another important feature of life in the field—bringing up the water—were well described by a Victorian, Saddler-Sergeant A. E. Satchwell: 'Our water-carts were subjected to a very rough handling while bringing water into the front line. The South Australian cart was drawn by two horses and driven by one of the contingent who went by the name of "Dashing George", given him by his comrades for bravery while getting water to us under fire.

'After filling the cart at the nearest water hole he could be seen coming at a gallop, driving in a zig-zag in order to be less likely to be hit by the Boer guns, which no matter how many might be in action, would all be turned on the cart as soon as it was seen. When in action, if one looked along the firing line, one could see Bugler William Pleasents and Trooper Albert Butcher, the two boy members of our contingent, who although in their teens were doing as much for their country as any veteran.'

The dramatic and successful strategy carried out by Lord Roberts on the western front caused the commandos under Christian de Wet and De la Rey in front of Arundel to pause before making a general attack. Finally the danger of being cut off from the main line of communications by the rapid approach of Roberts from the west sent them in haste back beyond Colesberg and over the Orange River to the Free State.

On 28 February General Clements entered Colesberg. Corporal Leslie Deegan of the Second Victorian Contingent wrote: 'We have just driven the Boers out of Colesberg and made a triumphant march into the town. We were the first British troops to arrive here, and were received with great enthusiasm. The people cried for joy, shook hands all round and treated us to fruit, tea and other luxuries, and seemed greatly delighted to see the old flag again.' Trooper Albert Coxhead from New South Wales commented: 'The place (Colesberg) is decorated with red, white and blue, one house having "Advance Australia" on it.'

On the Sunday morning a chaplain and Major Reay accompanied an Australian burial party which rode out beyond Coleskop having heard that Major Eddy and the others who fell were still unburied on Pink Hill. The bodies were found where they had fallen. Most of the clothing was gone even down to the boots. Sentries were posted as the chaplain conducted the burial service, the men standing with bared heads.

All the men who fell in the area in the defence of Cape Colony have since been brought in and they rest today in the British Military Cemetery within the township of Colesberg.





Men of the First Victorian Infantry Company shortly after their arrival in South Africa in November 1899. The company was later horsed and absorbed into the First Australian Regiment. *(Australian War Memorial)*



Lieutenant G. J. Grieve, a New South Wales Special Service Officer, who was killed at Paardeberg on 18 February 1900 while serving with the Black Watch.

(Australian War Memorial)

C. F. Cox who, as a captain, commanded the contingent of New South Wales Lancers, the first Australian troops to land in South Africa.

(H. Stephens)



Lieutenant W. V. Dowl ng, First Australian Horse, who was seriously wounded and taken prisoner at Slingsfontein on 16 January 1900.

(Mrs J. W. Joyce)





Loading horses for the Second New South Wales Contingent on to the transport *Southern Cross* at Sydney in January 1900.
(National Library)

The arrival of 'A' Squadron of the New South Wales Mounted Rifles at Cape Town on 6 December 1899.
(South Africa Defence Headquarters)





Sergeant H. McIntosh, 'A' Squadron, New South Wales Mounted Rifles, wearing
a British-issue khaki uniform.
(Australian War Memorial)

Boer snipers on Spion Kop.

(National Army Museum, London)



A Boer hospital train arriving at Pretoria.

(South Africa Defence Headquarters)





A group of Boers. Self-reliant, highly mobile and skilled in the use of cover, they proved a formidable enemy.

(Australian War Memorial)

Over page

Newly-recruited Bushmen in camp at Kensington Racecourse, Sydney, in 1900.

(New South Wales Government Printer)





A troop of New South Wales Citizens' Bushmen on parade not long before their departure for South Africa. This regiment was raised initially by public subscription.
(New South Wales Government Printer)

Over page

New South Wales Citizens' Bushmen marching through Sydney before their embarkation on 28 February 1900.
(New South Wales Government Printer)





Deserted Boer positions, west of Mafeking, after the relief. (*Australian War Memorial*)



British infantry at Driefontein on 10 March 1900. (*Australian War Memorial*)



A Boer convoy of the Heilbron commando near Reitz, retiring northwards after the fall of Bloemfontein in March 1900.

(National Army Museum, London)

British prisoners of war, including several Australians, released from Waterval compound on 6 June 1900 during the British advance.

(Australian War Memorial)



Lieutenant N. R. Howse, New South Wales Army Medical Corps, the first Australian to be awarded the Victoria Cross. Howse received the award for rescuing a wounded man under fire at Vredefort on 24 July 1900. (*Australian War Memorial*)



Trooper T. C. Morris, New South Wales Lancers. (*H. Stephens*)



A camp of the New South Wales Imperial Bushmen in 1900. The crude shelters were erected because of a shortage of tents.
(Australian War Memorial)



Australian Bushmen preparing to leave Mafeking for service in the Transvaal in August 1900.
(Australian War Memorial)



Lieutenant R. E. Zouch of the New South Wales Citizens' Bushmen. Zouch commanded the vital post overlooking the water supply during the defence of Elands River.
(T. Zouch)



Trooper John Waddell, one of the Australians killed in action at Elands River on 4 August 1900. (Australian War Memorial)



A stone roughly carved by one of the men of the Elands River garrison in memory of Squadron Sergeant-Major J. Mitchell, Trooper J. D. Duff, Trooper J. Waddell and Trooper J. E. Walker who were killed during the siege of the garrison post.

(Author)

Graves of men killed at Elands River, photographed recently by author.





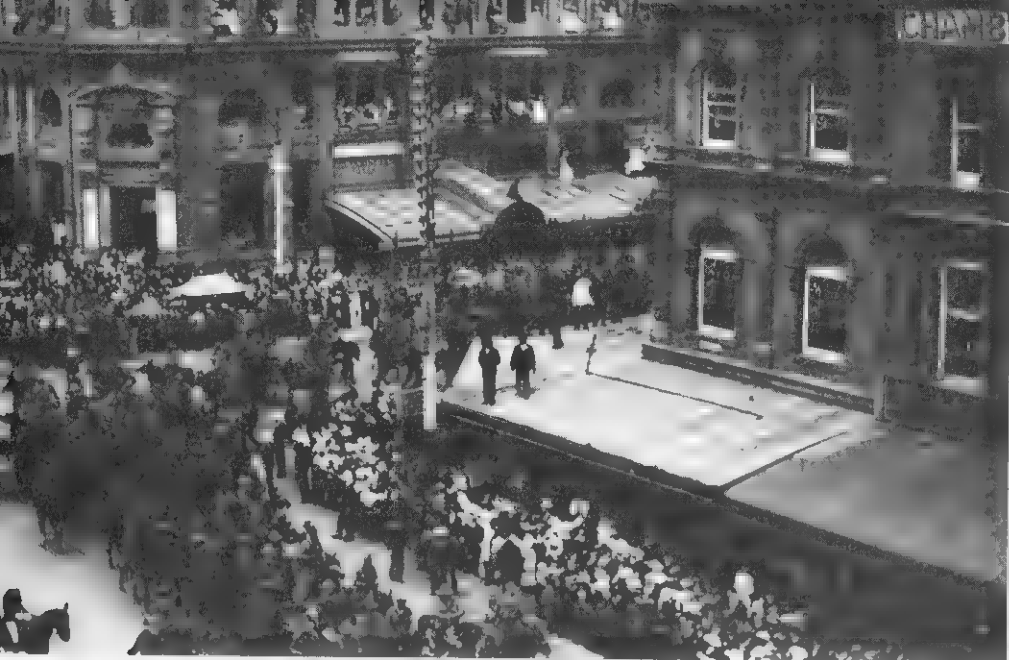
Lieutenant R. J. L. White, New South
Wales Imperial Bushmen, killed at
Manana, 12 September 1900.

(Australian War Memorial)

New South Wales Imperial Bushmen
preparing fodder for the horses.

(Australian War Memorial)





A parade of Victorian Bushmen through Melbourne before embarkation. The picture shows the Bushmen turning from Swanston Street into Collins Street at the Town Hall corner.

(Australian War Memorial)

A New South Wales Bushman with local natives.

(Australian War Memorial)





New South Wales Imperial Bushmen crossing a river during their advance in the Transvaal, in 1900.

(Australian War Memorial)

Six Boer commandants.

(National Army Museum, London)





New South Wales Imperial Bushmen in action in the vicinity of Ottoshoop in the Transvaal, September 1900.
(Australian War Memorial)



Bushmen advancing during operations in the Transvaal in 1900.
(Australian War Memorial)

A parade of returned members of the first New South Wales Contingent at Victoria Barracks, Sydney, early in 1901.

(New South Wales Government Printer)





Trooper J. H. Bisdee, VC, of the Tasmanian Imperial Bushmen, welcomed home from South Africa. Bisdee was awarded the Victoria Cross for rescuing a comrade under fire on 1 September 1900.
(Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery)

Soldiers from the Gundagai district welcomed home on their return from the Boer War.
(National Library)





A group of youthful well-armed Boers.

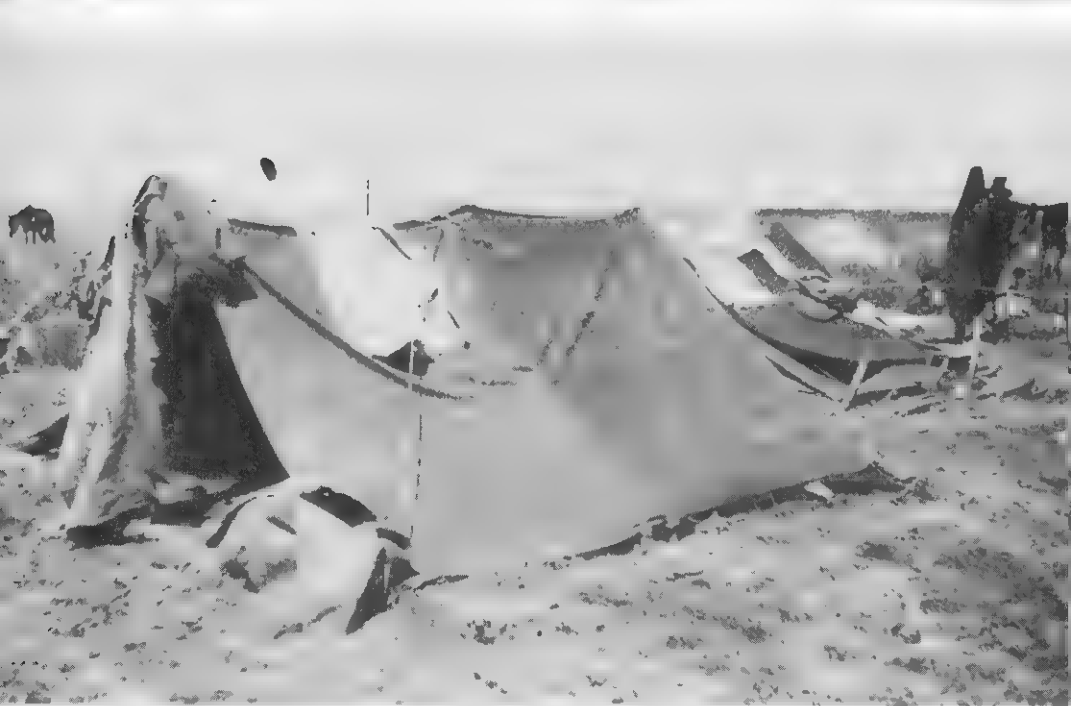
(National Army Museum, London)



An Australian regiment advancing, South Africa, 1901. . (*Australian War Memorial*)

Australian troops keeping watch on a Boer outpost. (*Australian War Memorial*)





Australians camped on the veldt. Their makeshift tents are made from army blankets.

(A. J. Weir)

The burial of three Australians who were ambushed on 8 April 1901.

(Australian War Memorial)





Officers of the Fifth Victorian Mounted Rifles with Major A. C. Daly (wearing a cap) of the West Yorkshire Regiment under whom they were then serving, at Middelburg in July 1901. A few weeks earlier the Victorians had suffered severe losses at Wilmansrust. In the second row of the group (third from right) is Lieutenant L. C. Maygar who was later awarded the Victoria Cross. *(Australian War Memorial)*



Lieutenant G. B. Forster, Second New South Wales Mounted Rifles, with 'supplementary' rations. Forster was killed in action at Bethel on 10 December 1901.

(Australian War Memorial)

Australian soldiers playing 'two-up' in South Africa.

(A. J. Weir)





A troop of the 2nd Battalion, Scottish Horse, who mainly recruited in Victoria.
 From left to right, the centre of the group are (left to right) Sergeant F. Armstrong,
 Sergeant Major Whitmore and Corporal R. Hodgson. — Australian War Memorial

Australian troops with a Boer prisoner.





Men of the New South Wales Mounted Rifles crossing the Orange River in 1901.
(*Australian War Memorial*)

Australian troops watering horses at Doornkop Spruit in the Transvaal. (A. J. Weir)



Captains A. E. Forrest and S. R. Antill, company commanders of the First Battalion Australian Commonwealth Horse, in the Transvaal in 1902. Forrest had previously served in Natal on General Buller's staff and later with Bethune's Mounted Infantry. Antill had served earlier in the war with the New South Wales Mounted Rifles.

(A. J. Weir)



Seaforth Highlanders on the march.

(A. J. Weir)



An unpleasant task which the Australians reluctantly performed in the later stages of the war was the systematic destruction of Boer crops and houses. An officer of the First Australian Commonwealth Horse is shown here in command of a party destroying a crop.
(Australian War Memorial)

A British blockhouse.

(A. J. Weir)



Lieutenant H. B. ('The Breaker') Morant,
executed at Pretoria gaol on 27 February
1902.



Lieutenant G. R. Witton, photographed
in 1930. He was released in 1904 from a
life sentence for his part in the Morant-
Handcock affair. (*Australian War Memorial*)



27.2.02

Dear

I have but an hour or so
 longer to exist. And altho my brain
 has been harassed for four long weary
 months I cant refrain from writing
 you a few last lines, I am going to
 find out if your grandpa is not, I will free
 my God, with the firm belief I am
 innocent of ~~murder~~ & obey my
 orders and served my King as I
 thought best. If I ever siped my
 duty I can only ask my People &
 Country for forgiveness Tell poor
 Polly to take care of little Ellen for
 me at all costs. They were my greatest
 comforts at Home & my greatest trouble
 now I hope my Country will see
 my children cared for I will die
 for the sake of all. God, forgive my
 enemies & give you peace for ever.
 I have not heard if our Brother Eugene
 was killed in the watch house or not
 but if not tell him & will I have
 gone to rest Tell Peter and Willie to
 be good to their sister God, be with
 you in your trouble
 from your fond Brother
 J. Hancock

Publication for ever
Amner

Just four more notes to all old friends
 especially if you can send a 5 shilling & 8 shilling note out of my
 pocket

Photocopy of Lieutenant Handcock's farewell letter to his sister.

Lieutenant C. B. B. White, a Staff Officer with the First Australian Commonwealth Horse in South Africa. Many veterans of the South African war, including White, were later to hold senior appointments in the First AIF. White eventually became General Sir Brudenell White, Chief of the General Staff and later Chairman of the Commonwealth Public Service Board.

(A. J. Weir)



Veterans of the South African war who were serving with the 2/23rd Training Battalion in Australia in 1940: *left to right, back row*, Staff-Sergeant C. Blackburn, Sergeant J. C. N. Davies; *front row*, Private J. Symons, Staff-Sergeant D. Stuart, DCM, Corporal A. Silcock.

(Australian War Memorial)



CHAPTER 8

The relief of Kimberley and the battle for Paardeberg

When Lord Roberts arrived at Cape Town on 10 January 1900 he found the army extended over a front of 500 miles—from Methuen at Modder River station in the west to Buller on the Tugela River in the east. In the centre both French at Rensburg and Gatacre at Klerkstroom were operating with comparatively slight forces. The task before the new Commander-in-Chief was to take the offensive by carrying the war across the borders of the Republics. In doing so he would force the Boers to loosen their grip on the besieged British towns.

Meanwhile troopships continued to disembark reinforcements, but the need for more mounted troops remained. Roberts tried to overcome this by raising more South African Colonial units and at the same time converting the Australian infantry squadrons into mounted infantry. To Sir Redvers Buller he allowed the opportunity, one that was accepted, of retaining command of the army in Natal with their immediate objective of continuing the fight for the relief of Ladysmith.

When Roberts and his staff left Cape Town for the front on 8 February 1900 the war had been in progress just a few days short of four months. During this time all the fighting had taken place outside the soil of the

Republics. From the very first days of the war the commandos had occupied British territory where they continued to enjoy all the advantages of fighting outside their own country while their own borders stayed secure. Entrenched in advantageous positions they barred the way to the besieged towns of Mafeking, Ladysmith and Kimberley, names which by this time were ringing round the world.

Roberts decided that the best way to enter the Republics lay from the west where the railway to Kimberley still used the only bridge left standing across the Orange River. He planned to relieve Kimberley quickly then march across the veldt due east to seize Bloemfontein, the capital of the Orange Free State.

For some weeks Roberts concentrated troops between the Orange River camp and Modder River station. Cronje meanwhile waited at Magersfontein busily improving his entrenchments in expectation of a second frontal attack. By amalgamating the troopers in the west with the newly arrived reinforcements and all the men who could be spared from the centre, Roberts assembled a mobile column under the command of General French capable of making rapid movements carrying considerable weight. With this force Roberts proposed to open his campaign with a wide sweeping easterly movement designed to swing back to the west towards Kimberley. Consequently the Cavalry Division concentrated at Ramdam, a farm with a large pan of water—the only water supply between the railway at Graspan and the Riet River.

The New South Wales Mounted Rifles, under Captain Antill, cleared the Boers from the vicinity of a farm at Ramah, 15 miles east of Orange River station. On 10 February they were joined there by Colonel O. C. Hannay with a Mounted Infantry Brigade, a mixed column of Imperial and Colonial squadrons—Kitchener's Horse, New Zealand Mounted Rifles and a detachment of Rimington's Scouts. On the march to the Modder the brigade formed a protective rearguard for the marching infantry columns.

On the evening of the 10th Roberts addressed his commanders to outline the plan for the march: 'You will remember,' he said, 'what you are going to do all your lives, and when you have grown to be old men you will tell the story of the relief of Kimberley.'¹

The march to Kimberley began at 2 o'clock on the morning of 12 February in the hottest month of the year when the daily temperatures on the veldt were commonly 100 degrees Fahrenheit and over. The cavalry and horse artillery moved out into the Orange Free State across 16 miles of waterless veldt heading for Waterval Drift, the nearest point on the Riet River. There they found de Wet waiting in the kopjes on the far side of the drift with 500 burghers and guns.

¹ L. S. Amery (ed.), *The Times History of the War in South Africa*, Vol 3 (1905), p. 372.

Not to be denied French crossed at De Kiel Drift five miles up the river. The burghers fell back from Waterval Drift when they found the British moving along the line of the river on their left. By 1 o'clock the British were camped along the northern bank of both drifts. With the drifts secured French waited on the arrival of the 7th Infantry Division. Escorted by mounted infantry this division had marched at 7 a.m. by way of Ramdam arriving at De Kiel Drift towards evening in a state of exhaustion. Some of the men barely off the troopship and train were unacclimatised and not in any condition for footslogging in the extreme conditions.

Of the men in the 15th Brigade, with nearly 4,000 in the ranks, nearly half fell out overcome by heat and thirst. Many were incapable of replacing the helmets that fell to the ground beside them. The worst affected men were picked up by the ambulances, others were taken up on wagons or gun carriages.

On the morning of 13 February Roberts inspected the cavalry in readiness for the march to the Modder. Units attached were the New South Wales Lancers, the Queensland Mounted Infantry and the New South Wales Army Medical Corps. Every saddle carried supplies for two days for both horse and rider. The brigades rode off at 10 o'clock, the New South Wales Lancers on the right flank soon coming under shell-fire. With 25 miles of scorching and waterless veldt before them the brigade swept on unwilling to be diverted.

Two miles from the river the columns came within effective range of the burghers on riverside kopjes but the heat-affected horses and riders, to whom the river water was life, were not denied. The day ended with the British camped on the north bank of the Modder River holding two drifts, the Rondavel and the Klip, 2 miles apart.

The rapid march in the heat without the benefit of water along the way left the horses in such an exhausted condition that hundreds were shot. The artillery horses dropped in the harness throughout the day. Captain G. J. Johnston, a Victorian Special Service Officer attached to the 62nd Battery, Royal Field Artillery, said: 'We were all day in the burning sun. There is something wrong about this heat. It simply burns through everything, and you cannot get the slightest shelter. One simply sits on the red sand and grows gradually silly. We started without breakfast, and had nothing to eat till 9 o'clock at night.'

Conditions were made worse by the veldt fires. The fires also damaged a cable laid by the field detachment from a cable cart that managed to keep up with the horsemen. This meant that the lines of communication between cavalry and infantry depended on despatch riders. All the next day the cavalry waited for the infantry to take up the duty of guarding the line of the river and the drifts. In the late afternoon the supply column began to

arrive at the Modder. Exhausted from having to contend all day and half the night with the heat and storms the infantry did not arrive at the river until 1 a.m. on the 15th.

Sergeant J. S. Dooley, New South Wales Lancers, gave this account of the march to the Riet and the Modder: 'Next morning we were on the march at daylight, and at dinner time had not passed all the wagons. There were 2,000 wagons loaded with supplies, and from 12 to 20 bullocks each. It was a very hot day, and the infantry were dropping all the way from exhaustion. We came to the Riet River about one o'clock, where all the advance party halted for the night. We were shown where to camp, and were not long in getting down to the river for a swim, and a good lie down in the shade. The river is not very large, only about 40 yards across, but the water is good.

'The next day was very hot, and we suffered greatly for want of water. There was not a drop on the road, so we had to push on and get to the Modder River, which was 26 miles away. We got there a little before dark, and surprised a Boer camp. There was a few prisoners taken and lots of stores and cattle. The Boers had left in a hurry, as there were three wagons loaded with flour, and all sorts of knick-knacks. We remained at the river all day, and everyone was trying his hand at making damper out of the flour.'

Trooper A. A. Burgin told how the New South Wales Lancers stayed with the vanguard all the way: 'We started for the Modder River. We travelled very fast, not even resting for dinner. No water to drink, no food for man or horse. We had a small fight on the way, one of our men getting hurt. To make things worse somebody set fire to the grass and we had to retire. When we reached the river, where the Boers had a big camp, we took them by surprise. They left wagons with the bullocks all harnessed up. We were the first to cross the river. We found the ford for the cavalry. We had a great job getting the horses across, they wanted to stop and drink. We helped ourselves to tinned fruit and Boer bread. We were up early next morning and the sight I shall never forget. As far as you could see, behind and to the left, was nothing but troops—50,000 and about 1,000 wagons.'

Trooper T. C. Morris wrote: 'The New South Wales Lancers were right in the front. I had many narrow escapes owing to bullets just missing me. When we got to the Modder River, we could see all the Boer tents and teams of bullocks, with dozens of big wagons. These were all captured. The Boers attacked us with their artillery and rifles. At once our artillery got into action, and responded while the cavalry charged. Lieutenant Osborne and 10 of the Lancers were sent down to the river to find a crossing place. I was the first man to get over as I was sent in to try the depth of the

water. As soon as we got across and charged on the other side the Boers stampeded. We could not follow them as we had that day travelled 27 miles without food or water for ourselves or horses, and our horses were knocked up.'

General Cronje remained unconcerned when he heard that General French was on the move, still of the opinion that the British would not attempt to carry out a major operation away from the railway. When at last he realised that infantry were following up the mounted troops the real significance of the situation became obvious to him and he sent 900 men with guns to block the way. Benefiting by the unavoidable delay to the cavalry at Klip Drift the Boers used the time to quickly establish themselves on favourable ground astride the British line of march north of the drift.

On the morning of the 15th the Klip Drift camp came under shell fire and an artillery duel began. Because of the late arrival during the night of the baggage and supplies the cavalry was not ready to move until 9.30 a.m. Supplies for two days were distributed for every horse and rider.

From Klip Drift rising ground led to the Boer position resting on a hill to the left and on a ridge to the right. Between lay a low nek three-quarters of a mile wide. Artillery was placed on the hill and well-placed marksmen waited along the ridge. Quickly summing up the situation French ordered a cavalry charge right through the centre of the nek.

In extended formation under covering fire from the batteries 6,000 horsemen galloped up the slope in the face of both converging and frontal fire. It was the most dramatic charge of the war. From the pounding hoofs of the leading squadrons rose great clouds of dust screening them and the following squadrons from view. The speed of the charge through the moving wall of dust made even such a large body of horsemen a difficult target and most of the Boer fire was ineffective. At the sight of the charging squadrons bearing down on them the thin line of possibly not more than a couple of hundred burghers along the nek jumped on their horses and rode for their lives. The burghers broke everywhere, fleeing towards Magersfontein.

The impetus of the charge took the cavalry a mile beyond the nek. The losses were only 15 killed and wounded and the way to Kimberley lay open before them. At Avon's Dam, 6 miles from the drift, the riders assembled for an hour's spell and refreshment although the amount of water in the dam was too little to water the horses. The final lap of the march to Kimberley began at noon. In the late afternoon from a kopje outside the town shells fell close to the New Zealanders but ineffectively. The burghers left hurriedly, abandoning an uneaten meal in the laager.

Soon after 6 o'clock on Thursday, 15 February 1900, General French and his staff entered Kimberley. Thus ended a siege of over four months. Most of the enemy had retired from the vicinity of the town. The next day the

Queenslanders and New Zealanders took part in an action at Dronfield, 11 miles to the north of Kimberley, working all day along the enemy flanks. Captain Harry Chauvel wrote: 'We had a pretty hard day's fighting the day after we arrived, driving the Boers out from around Dronfield.'

On the same day the New South Wales Lancers went into action at Alexandria, on the outskirts of Kimberley. Sergeant J. S. Dooley wrote: 'We were turned out at 4.30 a.m. without breakfast for ourselves or horses, and sent about 12 miles out to a place called Alexandria, where the Boers were entrenched on top of a kopje. We could not get them out of the trenches and when it was nearly dark Colonel [T. C.] Porter gave the order to retire. We got into camp about 8 o'clock. We had been out since morning without anything but a bottle of water and biscuit and I am sure it must have been 120 degrees in the shade.'

Kimberley had suffered little damage in the siege, the enemy for the most part being content with cutting water supplies where they could and in blocking the arrival of food and stores. The defence under Colonel R. G. Kekewich had depended chiefly on several thousand volunteers, local men and Uitlander refugees. There was also a detachment of nearly 500 men of the North Lancashire Regiment who arrived a week before the siege began. The ranks also included 50 Royal Field Engineers and a number of garrison artillerymen.

Situated in open country within a few miles of the Orange Free State border Kimberley during the siege sheltered a population of 48,000 people of all races within a perimeter of 20 miles. The total included 5,000 refugees from the Boer Republics. At one time the diamond mines sheltered 3,000 women and children 1,200 feet below the ground level.

The defence possessed no armament heavier than six completely out of date 7-pounder guns and a number of Maxim guns. Lee-Metford rifles were in rather short supply. These, however, were sufficient to keep at bay an enemy unwilling to take the losses that an outright attack would have incurred.

In the flat country the defence made good use of the slag heaps from the diamond mines situated around the town. Some of these reached a height of 120 feet. Miles of barbed wire fences and entanglements were constructed. Fields of dynamite mines were set ready to be fired after visual warning from observation towers. The De Beers Mining Company with which Cecil Rhodes was associated supplied five powerful searchlights and manufactured shells for the small guns.

The De Beers workshop turned out a 25-pounder gun constructed only 24 days after the chief engineer, an American named George Labram, completed the design. The gun fired hundreds of shells and gave the defence some parity in range and weight with the Boer artillery. The gun was

named 'Long Cecil', after Rhodes who was in the town and played a prominent part in the civilian defence arrangements.

Colonel Kekewich could survey the outline of the defences from a tower nearly 160 feet high. All outposts were interlocked and connected by telephone to headquarters. The defenders generally showed more aggression than the burghers. Kekewich kept his forces active by reconnaissance and sorties on enemy outposts in which the volunteer mounted troops did most of the fighting. The Boer forces numbering from 4,000 to 5,000 were content to keep up a desultory bombardment at the extreme range of their guns rather than take losses attacking over open country. On several occasions the Boers sent Cape carts in to Kekewich under a flag of truce for medical supplies.

Three Australians, Veterinary Lieutenant F. W. Melhuish of the New South Wales Lancers and the correspondents 'Banjo' Paterson and H. Spooner, rode with General French and his staff into Kimberley. 'At Kimberley', wrote Paterson, 'the people simply hurled themselves at the horses and cried and wept for joy.'

A New Zealand trooper said that the men had little food on arrival in Kimberley. By the Sunday morning no rations had been issued since Klip Drift four days before. Some of the men were allowed to go into the town to attend church services but in fact many went in to see what food they could get. On the Sunday afternoon a pound of bread a man was issued.

The New South Wales Lancers after having served under French on the Colesberg front kept up with the cavalry on the entire march and Paterson could proudly say: 'It was a stirring sight for an Australian when the New South Wales Lancer squadron, well mounted and fit, pulled out alongside the Scots Greys and Inniskillings and held their own on that desperate march to Kimberley.' The Queensland Mounted Infantry, the New Zealand Mounted Infantry, and the New South Wales Army Medical Corps also went with the cavalry to Kimberley.

The 70-mile march to Kimberley, in which there was not a great deal of fighting but great hardship for the troops, depended for success on the speed of movement and the withholding of the ultimate direction and purpose from the enemy for as long as possible. The cavalry, always the spearhead, left in its wake the infantry divisions guarding the drifts on the two rivers with long convoys of supplies and baggage stretching for miles along the march escorted by Mounted Infantry. Without the arrival as planned of these groups at the various points of progress the march could never have been sustained. The mobility of the cavalry and the endurance of the infantry carried the day. The march involved the fitting out and organising of thousands of wagons drawn by thousands of oxen and mules over a hot and arid country, usually waterless for miles on end.

Trooper Parkinson, an Australian serving with Kitchener's Horse, wrote from Kimberley: 'Kimberley is relieved at last. We had some awful marches and I am fairly done up. For two days I have been commanding officer's galloper, and during that time have had four horses drop under me; three galloped to death and one was shot. We killed our horses and almost killed ourselves to relieve the Diamond City. Our orders were to get through at any cost, and I think the very desperation and the mad way we came over frightened the enemy. So we had little fighting.'

Corporal J. Ford, a New South Wales Lancer, reported: 'We reached Kimberley last Thursday after a very rough trip from Belmont. Of course you will have read all about the great flying column that reached Kimberley. It is not hard to trace our way here—dead horses all the way killed by hard riding. The Duke of Teck, one of the Royal Family, is writing a letter on his saddle within a few feet of me now. One man is as good as another here.'

From Kimberley Trooper James Johnson, also a New South Wales Lancer, wrote: 'All that we have seen is bully beef and biscuits, and some days we have never seen any water. We would leave a place in the morning and fill our water-bottles which only hold a pint and a half. And the thirst you have after eating bully beef.'

The relief of Kimberley coming after a series of misfortunes gave the British cause a much needed uplift. Yet in essence it was a great flanking movement resulting in British troops being strung out along the lines of communication between Cronje's army at Magersfontein, and his supply base at Bloemfontein.

On the morning when French began the final break through to Kimberley, Roberts sent an infantry brigade from Wegdraai Drift to march on Jacobsdal. This small centre lying between the converging rivers fell without too much opposition. On the heights near the town 200 Boers fought so well that the occupation did not take place until 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

On the same morning a commando led by General de Wet pounced on a supply convoy at Waterval Drift with disastrous results. The drivers were breakfasting when de Wet attacked with a field gun and a pom-pom gun. Half of the oxen grazing close to the river stampeded and were lost. The rest were either killed or maimed. The soldiers guarding the drift kept the burghers at bay preventing the capture of the wagons. Nevertheless the damage was done for the convoy had to remain immobilised unless fresh teams could be found.

Lieut-General C. Tucker arrived at the drift with express orders from the Commander-in-Chief not to wait about on the scene. Roberts had said there must be no attempt to recover the teams if this would involve a long delay. Tucker very promptly decided to abandon the supply column. The decision meant that a train of 200 wagons fell into enemy hands together

with eight days food for the troops and forage for the horses. In the weeks ahead the army felt severely the loss of so much forage, rations and transport. Nevertheless the loss occurred when Roberts was prepared to make a sacrifice and when speed meant so much for the success of the strategy. The entire army—men and animals—went over to half-rations. The rationing stayed until the entry into Bloemfontein at the end of February.

General Cronje was loth to move from Magersfontein until at noon on the 15th he received intelligence of the break through at Klip Drift. At last aware of the danger of his position he got his convoys under way by 9 o'clock that same evening, trekking in the direction of Bloemfontein.

Over the lengthy stay at Magersfontein Cronje had collected an immense amount of baggage. Many burghers were joined in the laager by their families. Consequently Cronje's camp held many women and children all of whom he elected to entrust to the great convoy of wagons when they limbered up for the night march. The success of his flight depended on his ability to slip past in front of the Sixth Infantry Division at Klip Drift, the crossing so recently used by French's cavalry, and thence by skirting the Modder to the drift called Koedoesrand. Once across to the southern bank of the river the way to Bloemfontein was open.

At 4.30 a.m. on 16 February British infantry began moving up from Klip Drift towards Kimberley. An hour and a half later a detachment of Rimington's Scouts was reconnoitring widely from the mounted escort and saw from the ridge, where the Boer guns had been active against French the day before, a cloud of dust rising from the wheels of a long line of wagons being dragged eastward by bullock teams. By capturing several lagging wagons the Scouts learned from the burghers made prisoner that this was indeed the rearguard of Cronje's army.

Within hours of the discovery of Cronje's position on that morning of 16 February the news reached the column commander, General Kitchener. He immediately sent the mounted infantry in hard pursuit with orders to follow and hang on to the convoy at all costs. Cronje screened his rearguard with a force of 2,000 riflemen, who kept up a running fight all that day with the 1st Mounted Infantry Brigade. Led by Colonel Hannay, the brigade was made up of British Mounted Infantry, the New South Wales Mounted Infantry, Rimington's Scouts and detachments of Roberts's Horse and Kitchener's Horse.

About 4 o'clock in the afternoon of the same day, 16 February, the New South Wales Mounted Rifles contacted Cronje's rearguard and came under fire from the protecting gun batteries. Dismounting, the New South Welshmen advanced at the double over 400 yards until forced to go to ground by heavy fire from riflemen supporting the guns. When the British guns engaging the Boer batteries ran out of shells the colonials were forced

to gallop madly back across the veldt. That night they camped alongside the guns behind the hills.

On the next morning, 17 February, Cronje slipped away from the mounted infantry who did not make contact with his rearguard again until 10 a.m. Before midday the New South Wales Mounted Rifles, spear-heading Kitchener's advancing infantry column, spotted Cronje's wagons stopped along the river beyond Paardeberg Drift. In a skirmish with rifles and a pom-pom two New South Wales men were wounded. No time was lost in reporting back to Kitchener.

After 35 hours of trekking and fighting with his column heading for the drifts at Vendutie and Koedoesrand, Cronje felt safe enough to halt the convoy for breakfast and a couple of hours rest. His wagons halted, stretched along the north bank of the Modder for several miles beyond Paardeberg Drift. The burghers relaxed and boiled coffee.

By midday they were beginning to move again. Some wagons were about to cross at Vendutie Drift when the first shells fell. The surprise was complete. A headlong rush to the river began. The river was about 50 yards wide running at the bottom of a deep depression in the veldt with banks 15 feet and more deep and lined with short undergrowth giving good cover.

General French made his sudden appearance on the Modder at the end of a forced march from Kimberley. Serving under him, and attached to the field batteries that stopped Cronje as he was about to cross the river, was Major William Throsby Bridges, an Australian Special Service Officer. Bridges was to become the founder of the Australian Royal Military College, Duntroon. As Major-General Bridges in 1915 he commanded the Australians in the landing at Gallipoli and was mortally wounded there on 15 May 1915. He died on the 18th.

Early on 16 February Kitchener got a message through to Roberts at Jacobsdal that Cronje was trekking. Roberts at once telegraphed French at Kimberley but a fault on the line that could not be found and repaired until late in the day prevented the message reaching French before 11 o'clock that night. But Kitchener also took steps to get a message through to French. Very late in the afternoon he entrusted the message to Rimington's Scouts. Two riders started on the long 20-mile night ride to Kimberley carrying the vital information. They delivered the despatch to French one hour earlier than the telegraph message came through from Jacobsdal.

The cavalry was in no condition to commence another long march. Following the tiring entry into Kimberley they had spent the next day in the saddle harassing the enemy. The division was so weak that only 1,200 horses were fit enough to start the 30-mile ride to head off Cronje. Captain L. M. Phillips who took Kitchener's despatch to Kimberley rode back to the Modder following the tracks of French's jaded horses. The losses on

French's hurried march were so severe that all Phillips had to do was to keep to the way cast on the breeze by the smell of the dead horses.²

When the three horse batteries fired those first salvoes from a range of 3,000 yards north of the river the next concern of French was to conceal the weakness of his own force outnumbered by four to one. He anxiously awaited the arrival of the infantry from Klip Drift. Slightly upstream Koedoesrand Drift and the surrounding heights were held by Cronje's advance guard. In the afternoon the Boers made unsuccessful attempts from this quarter to breach the British left flank. Meanwhile the guns shelled the laager and the drift and stopped the wagons from crossing.

Towards sunset the sight of clouds of dust rising from beyond Paardeberg Drift heralded the arrival of the Mounted Infantry and relieved the anxieties of French. By midnight the infantry had marched to within 2 miles of Paardeberg and camped for the night, having covered 30 miles in 24 hours.

Dawn on 18 February saw Cronje in a laager concealed along 2 miles of the river bed. Between the deep-walled banks of the low and shallow waters of the river he found room for his cattle and horses along the shale bed. During the night and throughout the succeeding nights the burghers worked like beavers burrowing into the banks and constructing places of protection for the women and children.

Along the flats near the banks they resourcefully cut narrow slit trenches on both sides of the river for the riflemen. Nor did they neglect to make full use of the numerous dry spruits usually concealed by low scrub near the river. From such positions the burghers looked over clear fields of fire along both sides of the river, for the river flowed through a bare plain broken at intervals by a low ridge or kopje. From these elevations, usually a mile or two in the background, the sunken river bed was always hidden from view; its winding progress could only be discerned by the line of green growth marking the scrubby banks.

Kitchener ordered an immediate assault, anxious to take the laager before Boer reinforcements could arrive in strength to try and break the cordon. About 6 a.m. on the morning of 18 February the infantry supported by artillery went in on a frontal attack. The main advance over a wide front centred on a river bend on the south bank. The 1,500 yards separating the 13th Infantry Brigade and the Highland Brigade from the laager within the scrub-lined river course promised only a minimum of cover.

Five hundred yards from the objective the line faltered and came to a halt flattening against the almost bare veldt. The men clung to the earth for the best part of twelve hours behind nothing better than short tufty grass and low scattered ant hills in the intense heat without food or water. All

² L. M. Phillips, *With Rimington* (1901).

those who could do so dropped back out of range under the cover of darkness.

Lieutenant A. C. Neave, a Special Service Officer attached to the Yorkshire Regiment, fell that day far from his New Zealand home, leading his company in an assault on the trenches on the south bank. Lieutenant G. J. Grieve, also a Special Service Officer, was killed in front of the trenches on the southern bank of the river. A member of the New South Wales Permanent Staff, Grieve is honoured by a memorial erected by his friends and former comrades near where he fell. In the City of Sydney a granite obelisk to his memory stands outside the Scots Church near the southern approach to the Harbour Bridge. There is also a memorial at Watsons Bay, not far from the entrance to Sydney Harbour.

When he first arrived at Cape Town, Grieve was detailed to a position in the Railways Communications Staff Office. After the disaster to the Highland Brigade at Magersfontein when so many officers were lost Grieve at last succeeded in getting to the front, leaving at an hour's notice. On that Sunday morning at Paardeberg he went into action leading 'F' Company of the 2nd Battalion of the Black Watch.

Lieutenant Grieve at first fell shot through the body, but not seriously enough to stop him crawling to the assistance of one of his men. While doing so he was shot again in the chest and head. He was buried on the field in a common grave with about 50 of the Highlanders, in the presence of his mates in the New South Wales Mounted Rifles. His name was faithfully marked on a small cross made from boxwood and put over the grave. Major-General H. A. Macdonald, commanding the Highland Brigade, paid him high tribute in a special General Order on 19 October 1900.

Towards noon that same morning along the northern bank of the river just above Paardeberg Drift another assault was launched by British Infantry in which the Royal Canadian Infantry also figured. By early afternoon this movement had come to a standstill. Then Kitchener ordered the men lying within 500 yards of the Boer lines to charge with the bayonet. The troops rose from the ground moving with precision but the attack failed before the heavy short-range fire from the Mausers.

Colonel Hannay's 1st Mounted Infantry Brigade camped south-east of Paardeberg Drift on the night of 17 February within 2 miles of the laager. When it was still dark at 3 a.m. Kitchener ordered the brigade to ride towards Koedoesrand Drift. In the darkness two squadrons of Kitchener's Horse veered within 400 yards of the laager at Vendutie Drift coming under strong rifle fire. By 8.30 a.m. the Mounted Infantry held both Vanderberg's Drift and Banks Drift but the Boers retained both sides of Koedoesrand Drift.

The Mounted Infantry were also occupied during the morning in containing threatened attacks by small commandos under Commandant Steyn coming in from the east. Steyn also had several guns. His presence near the eastern ridges diverted some of the British troops and caused pressure from that quarter to ease at the time when British attacks were taking place from the north-west. French continued to hold the northern approaches against Boer reinforcements attempting to build up from that direction.

In the early afternoon Kitchener rode across and ordered Hannay's 4th Mounted Regiment to move towards the river leaving the New South Wales Mounted Infantry and a squadron of Kitchener's Horse to patrol the eastern area from Koedoesrand Drift through Stinkfontein Farm to Kitchener's Kopje. Two field batteries—the 81st and 76th—kept Steyn's men in check from the ridges.

Hannay crossed to the north bank of the river by Vanderberg's Drift with detachments of his Mounted Infantry and rode downstream for 2 miles. Then, dismounting, the troopers advanced to within 700 yards of the laager at Vendutie Drift. At the same time the Essex Regiment and the British Mounted Infantry tried to apply pressure from the southern bank opposite Vendutie Drift. Hannay sent a message to Kitchener saying that the defence was too strong. Kitchener still wanted to organise a concerted attack on the laager from all points and was eager to carry the day at the point of the bayonet before the Boers could summon the amount of relief Cronje was hoping for. But Kitchener was hampered as he had been all day by poor field communications.

In reply to Hannay's message Kitchener said: 'The time has come for a final effort. All troops have been warned that the laager must be rushed at all costs. Gallop up if necessary and fire into the laager.'

The Mounted Infantry was at this time still scattered widely over the field but on receiving the order at about 3 p.m. Hannay quickly gathered some troopers. In the heat of battle he charged leading these horsemen straight for the trenches on the north bank of Vendutie Drift and riding into a hail of bullets. When his horse was shot from under him 300 yards from the trenches Hannay ran forward on foot following the men before he fell 200 yards in front of the Boer lines. Of the 60 horsemen whose gallant but futile charge carried them almost to the trenches only two returned unscathed. The others were either killed, wounded or captured.

To this day Colonel Ormelie Campbell Hannay, of the Argyll and Sutherland Highland Regiment, rests alone where he fell by the bank of the Modder. The lonely headstone faces the drift where Hannay and the Mounted Infantry charged headlong at the Boer laager.

Coming on top of the long exhausting march in the heat with only a minimum of rest and sleep, the long and torrid opening day of battle on

18 February was a severe test on the stamina and courage of the infantry. They went into action across an open field in clear daylight against a force well entrenched and armed with the most modern high velocity magazine rifles. When darkness fell, illuminating the fires from the burning wagons amid the crackle of rifles and the thunder of guns, the soldiers were in much the same situation as in the early morning. Furthermore they had suffered the highest casualties of any single day in the war, with 320 killed and 1,392 wounded.

Affected by a heavy cold Lord Roberts had not moved from Jacobsdal 30 miles away. On the morning of 19 February he arrived before Cronje's laager. Quickly satisfying himself that the position could not be stormed without incurring further heavy losses he placed his now overwhelming forces in a tight cordon of men and guns surrounding the laager. When Roberts learned of the presence of the women and children with the Boer army he contacted Cronje to assure them safe conduct through his lines to wherever they wished to go. He also offered medicines and the services of surgeons for the treatment of the wounded in the laager. Cronje rejected outright the offer of safe conduct for the non-combatants but was ready to accept the medical and surgical aid provided the surgeons did not leave the laager again until he himself was ready to do so. To this Roberts would not agree.

With the benefit of information sent from a captive balloon the guns, ranging from Maxims to the great 4.7-inch naval guns, kept up a continuous bombardment with the result that little movement was possible within the confines of the river banks. In the end the British had 91 guns and the Boers only six. Two of the latter could not be fired because of the lack of shells.

'Banjo' Paterson described the ring around the laager at this stage as a large oval shape 'about four miles across the centre, New South Wales Lancers, Queenslanders and African Colonials at the eastern end of the oval, holding a lot of kopjes and a river crossing. The New South Wales Mounted Rifles and New South Wales Hospital were at the other end of the oval, and the intermediate space filled by British troops.'

While Roberts waited for the effects of the bombardment and hunger to bring about Cronje's surrender he intercepted and repelled 3,500 Boer reinforcements arriving from the east. The cordon held although General de Wet with 600 men took several advantageous positions facing the southern bank.

Trooper J. A. Weston, New South Wales Lancers, wrote: 'We came up with a force of Boers that tried to relieve Cronje. They opened fire with their artillery and we immediately replied with 7 guns and drove them back. We camped in their laager for the night. They left a good supply of

flour which we got and there were dampers and johnny cakes knocking about for a week.'

Early on 18 February the Mounted Infantry had occupied a kopje more than 300 feet high just two miles south of the laager. The height was soon to become known as Kitchener's Kopje. The hill commanded the laager and a long sweep of the river. On the afternoon of 18 February, de Wet succeeded in taking the kopje with the intention of forcing a diversion in the attacks on the laager. About 50 men held out in a nearby farm building before surrendering. The Yorkshire and Gloucester Regiments counter-attacking took up a position in front of the kopje at dusk. De Wet dragged up a field gun and a pom-pom overnight. In the morning of 19 February he shelled British positions.

Attempts were made to shift the Boers all day but it was not until just before dark that the infantry established themselves on one end of the hill aided by shelling from the 76th Field Battery and the 12-pounder naval guns situated west from the kopje. Even then Roberts ordered a withdrawal overnight. The commando held on until 21 February when de Wet narrowly made good his escape.

On 23 February the rain came, falling unceasingly for a day and a night. The difficulties and miseries of the besieged burghers became intensified when the river rose by several feet. Roberts augmented the bombardment by introducing howitzers. In his despatches on 27 February 1900 he wrote: 'Each night the trenches were pushed forward towards the enemy's laager, so as to gradually contract his position, and at the same time I bombarded it heavily with artillery, which was added to by the arrival of four 6-inch howitzers which I ordered up from De Aar. In carrying out these measures a captive balloon gave great assistance by keeping us informed of the dispositions and movement of the enemy.'

The work of the sappers enabled the infantry to advance on both sides of the river to within 550 yards of the Boer lines. Under the cover of night the Canadians by extending widely crept forward close to the ground to engage the enemy at very short range. They gave cover to sappers constructing a strategic entrenchment not much less than 100 yards from the Boer trenches. When daylight came the Canadians were already in occupation of this trench formed at an angle that allowed rifle fire to rake the Boer trench system running parallel with the river. By 6 o'clock the Boers opposite the Canadian sector found the trenches no longer tenable.

Lieut-General Sir Henry Colville, commanding the Canadians, wrote: 'The Canadians' cover was taken behind a fold in the ground, not complete protection, but took advantage of the slight 18-inch swell, making all the difference to the firing line lying down. Without it they probably could not have held their own.' After observing the scarcity of trenching tools,

Colville went on to say: 'In pacing the trenches they were found to be ninety yards apart, and we also knew that our new position besides commanding the inside laager as we had known beforehand it must do, enfiladed a trench running parallel to the river which protected the laager from any attack from the south. Cronje was therefore at our mercy.'³

Cronje who for some time had resisted suggestions to surrender ran up the white flag. At 7 a.m. he rode to the British headquarters on the south bank beyond Paardeberg Drift. There he accepted unconditional surrender after ten days resistance. The British casualties in the action from 16 to 27 February 1900 were 1,540 killed, wounded and missing.

As the battle waged special services were held in the Dutch Reformed Churches for the saving of Cronje's laager. The news of the surrender caused both sadness and dismay. Sadness not only for the defeat of Cronje but because this was their Majuba Day. The customary annual services of thanksgiving continued ever since that first Majuba Day became something very different. The bells were silenced, the celebrations muffled. In the words of President Kruger: 'The English have taken our Majuba Day from us.'⁴

In contrast to the trim uniformed figures of Roberts and his staff, Cronje was a short thick-set figure in loose fitting trousers turned up at the bottom and wearing a very long coat reaching well down beyond his knees. He carried a sjambok with which he continuously slapped his boots, from time to time vigorously spitting tobacco juice. Mrs Cronje accompanied him. Paterson saw Cronje as 'a square cut farmer-like man with dark eyebrows and a short beard, dressed in the outer costume of a long black frock coat, light trousers, tan boots and a slouch hat'.

Amid the carnage of hundreds of broken and twisted wagons along the river banks the women and children emerged safely from their long ordeal in the deep, loamy shell-proof shelters. Their sufferings from the danger of the battle, discomforts of the environment and the lack of food were ended. When the burghers walked out to lay down their arms the British found the sick and the wounded inside the laager surrounded by mud and slush in an atmosphere permeated with the stench from the dead and decaying horses and oxen.

Captain Antill, commanding A Squadron New South Wales Mounted Rifles, wrote from Paardeberg on 5 March: 'We have had only seven men wounded and about 12 horses in as many engagements—[Lieutenant] McLean is well, and a great help to me—as cool as ice under fire, as are all the men, excepting perhaps two. We collared Cronje and his army after ten days fighting on 27 February. They made a most gallant but hopeless struggle, but

³ Sir Henry Colville, *The Work of the Ninth Division in South Africa in 1900* (1901), pp. 48 and 50.

⁴ Amery (ed), *The Times History of the War in South Africa*, Vol 3, p. 487.

were outnumbered and completely surrounded. We were first into the laager (which was a pit of dead and filth) to collect prisoners, wounded, arms and ammunition, and it was a nauseous job. We took 170 wounded out of the trenches, which were a marvel of military engineering and totally impregnable to a hundred times their own strength. The wounded had been lying there without any medical attendance, Cronje having refused Roberts's offer to send surgeons, etc.'

'Banjo' Paterson who witnessed the surrender of the 4,000 burghers said: 'They were as brave a set of men as ever born.' Mr Spooner, correspondent for the *Sydney Evening News*, wrote: 'Many of the enemy's wounded lay where they had fallen, with parched lips and pallid faces, their wounds undressed and covered with blood and dirt. But they begged to be left to die when our stretcher bearers came to take them, for they had heard that they would be shot when they arrived in camp.'

Numbers of the wounded, both Briton and Boer, were cared for in the tented Field Hospital of the New South Wales Medical Corps, situated near headquarters in the field south of Paardeberg Drift. Lord Roberts visited the hospital and praised the work of the Corps. All the wounded suffered the discomfort of being transported 25 miles to the railway. A straggling line three miles long of ambulances and bullock wagons, the latter without even straw on which to bed down, jolted its way across the veldt.

In the last hours of the fighting some of the New South Wales Corps went into the trenches alongside the Canadians. Private S. M. Byrne recorded: 'This is how the Canadians sapped. They made trenches about one hundred yards from the Boer laager. Then the order was given to advance, and one of the Canadians happened to kick a biscuit tin. No sooner had he done so than all the Boer rifles went off. They were only 30 yards apart then. Then the order was given to retire to the trenches. The Boers put all the biscuit tins there as a signal.'

Major T. H. Fiaschi, a prominent Sydney doctor, received the surrender of 200 Boers. The incident was faithfully recorded by two members of the Corps. Private A. W. Russell wrote: 'We saw get up out of a trench in front of us an old Boer, who had a piece of white rag on a stick. He came towards us, others following him. Major Fiaschi took the stick from him, whereupon we walked into the trenches and disarmed the Boers.'

Private O. J. Stanton gave a more detailed account: 'At Paardeberg I was one of the squad of [stretcher] bearers who accompanied Major Fiaschi into the firing line. At one o'clock in the morning on the final day of the engagement we got into the trenches with Canadians, who had sapped away to within 80 yards of the Boer trenches. At two o'clock in the morning the Canadians began to fire volleys. The night was fine but dark, with no moon

and only a few stars out. The Boers fired back independently with single dropping shots.

'As it grew light our fire was doubled and some of the Canadians in their eagerness jumped out of the trenches to come to close quarters. One of them was shot, and Major Fiaschi who was in the same trench jumped out and ran to drag the wounded man back to shelter. As he did so a Boer with a white handkerchief tied to his rifle ran out from the trenches, and gave the surrender of all the enemy to Major Fiaschi. The Major referred him to the Canadian General, who directed the Boer Field-Cornet to order his men to come and lay down their arms at our trenches. There was some demur to this, and the Field-Cornet ordered his men to go back to their trenches and continue fighting.

'Meanwhile, I and two other bearers had got into the Boer trenches and were looking for their wounded when their men began to come back and we should be fired upon by our own men. However, the Boers gradually left their trenches and laid down their arms.'

Lieutenant A. J. Christie, a Special Service Officer from Victoria, wrote from Lord Roberts's headquarters near Stinkfontein Farm on 28 February: 'I arrived here on Tuesday morning about four o'clock, just in time to have a bit of a hand in settling Cronje. I was out in the Canadian trenches just before the advanced party, then retired to the main trenches. The Boer laager was shelled by salvoes from our 6th Howitzer, and the Canadians who had pushed up the trenches to within 200 yards of the Boer outposts, charged and had to retire, leaving 13 dead and about 60 wounded. They ran back to their main trench, and one Canadian in jumping over the dirt in front got a shot in the neck and fell on an officer of the Gordons and broke his leg. I was within 20 yards of him.

'At 5 a.m. Cronje surrendered. We had a grand bag—4,179 Boers in all, any amount of rifles and ammunition, five field guns, and one pom-pom Maxim. The Boers threw the breech blocks of their guns in the Modder River. I managed to loot a Mauser, a good deal of ammunition, a pom-pom shell and fuse, and a pony and a bridle and saddle. I had a yarn with a number of prisoners, many of whom were really pleased to get out of it. I am now attached to the Sixth Division ammunition column, and I think I will go with them to Bloemfontein. I have had two horses shot, one through the eye and the other in the ear, both too uncomfortably close. I got two Boers here.'

Trooper Albert Fisher, a Victorian, described the Boer defences: 'The trenches run alongside the river for 2 or 3 miles. Some are about six feet deep and caved under. Others contain shelves, while some are spread all over the place like so many rabbit warrens.'

The New South Wales Mounted Rifles formed part of the guard over the prisoners. Trooper Charles Brown referred to these duties: 'At night we

are guarding 4,000 Boers. They are a wild looking lot and give us some trouble sometimes; 400 of us were camped around them last night. We are mounted all night.'

Lieutenant W. A. Newman, one of the two New South Wales officers detailed to the escort taking Cronje and his family to the railway, wrote: 'After the surrender of Cronje, posts of responsibility in the escort which conveyed him as a prisoner of war to Modder River station en route to St Helena were given to two NSW officers, one of whom was myself. Cronje, who was accompanied by his wife, two sons, and a family physician, occupied a seat in a covered-in wagon drawn by 12 artillery horses. The scene of wild excitement which greeted the escort on arrival at Modder River station can better be imagined than described.'

Lieut-Commander W. J. Colquhoun, of the Victorian Naval Defences, also served as a Special Service Officer at Paardeberg. When he first arrived in the country Colquhoun found himself tied to a transport office post at the Cape before he managed to become attached to the Naval Brigade on the western front. He arrived in time to join the batteries shelling the Magersfontein ridge. Captain G. J. Johnstone described how 'whenever Grieve, Umphelby and myself had nothing in particular to do on the Modder we used to go over and have a yarn with Colquhoun, and watch him shelling Magersfontein. Every day in the cool of the evening the Boers used to come out of their trenches for a stroll, and our gunners used to have a go at them. We three used to sit on a breastwork and chaff Colquhoun about his shooting.'

On the drive with French to Kimberley Colquhoun commanded one of the 12-pounder naval guns in the action on the Modder at Klip Drift, where the gun he was working was hit by a shell which smashed one of the wheels. The wheels and the carriage had been hastily improvised at Simonstown. Not to be beaten Colquhoun surprised everybody, including Lieutenant Dean of the Royal Navy who commanded the other 12-pounder gun, when at the end of 12 hours solid work and improvising in the field he succeeded in modifying the wheels of a buck wagon sufficiently to fit them to the gun carriage. The gun was ready for action again.

The naval guns were in action quite early at Paardeberg participating in the shelling of Kitchener's Kopje and in the bombardment of the laager. The day before the surrender both of the 12-pounder guns became immobilised through wheel troubles.

Under instructions to get the guns to the depot at Cape Town, a mission that would have taken some weeks, Colquhoun chose to do a daring thing. He decided to vary the orders by taking the guns to Kimberley. At Kimberley he appealed to Cecil Rhodes for assistance. Rhodes placed the De Beers engineering shop at his disposal. The Australian scrounged around Kimberley

and managed to find wheels that could be used. Soon the guns were mounted for service again. Colquhoun got both guns back to the army at Paardeberg in time to join the column about to set out for Bloemfontein. The naval guns took part in every action right up to the entry into Bloemfontein.

The resourcefulness shown by this Australian officer was praised by the First Lord of the Admiralty, Mr G. J. Goschen, in announcing the award of the Distinguished Service Order to Lieut-Commander Colquhoun. Colquhoun later visited London and was decorated personally by Queen Victoria.

Although anxious to march on Bloemfontein Lord Roberts kept the army at Paardeberg for a week after the surrender of Cronje because of the condition of his horses and the boggy roads that were nothing better than dirt tracks across the veldt. When the move began the army had a fighting strength of 30,000 men, 12,000 horses, 10,000 mules and 116 guns. Men and animals were receiving half rations.

Corporal R. E. ('Ben') Harkus, New South Wales Lancers, wrote: 'They dish us out half a mess tin of flour a day and you can make what you like of it. You must not let too much stick to your fingers, or else you will find that by the time your damper is made you will have a very small bit left.'

One trooper described how some New South Wales men managed much better with rations increased by flour from the Boer laager at Paardeberg: 'We got part of their rations, including two big bags of flour, as big as corn sacks. We then set to work baking for two days, so you see we lived high. The Boer flour is better than ours, you can cook anything out of it, and it will cook just like arrowroot. We are all bakers now.'

Although rather dispirited by the failure to rescue Cronje, 7,000 burghers prepared to make a stand on ridges near the Modder River at Poplar Grove Drift, about 24 miles from Paardeberg on the road to Bloemfontein. The Boers held a position on both sides of the river with flanks extending widely to the north and to the south. The British plan of battle depended heavily on General French making a rapid and wide flanking movement on the Boer left, ending by veering back towards the river to cut off the line of retreat.

The New South Wales Mounted Rifles, the Queensland Mounted Infantry and Nesbitt's Horse were attached to the 14th Infantry Brigade. With its left flank close to the south bank of the Modder the brigade had been allotted the task: 'To threaten the enemy as best it can and draw their attention from the main attack.' It was 'to harass the enemy as much as possible'.

Quickly spotting French's flanking movement the Boers did not wait to risk being cut off but retired swiftly from both sides of the river. Not even

the presence of President Steyn of the Orange Free State or of President Kruger could stop the commandos.

Paul Kruger travelled 60 miles from Bloemfontein over heavy rain-soaked roads in a Cape cart arriving at the front in the early morning on 7 March. He intended to address the burghers in an effort to restore confidence but was persuaded by de Wet to return at once to avoid capture as by 7.30 a.m. the burghers were already beginning to retire. Nothing was left for the aged President and his bodyguard but to join the steady stream riding in the direction of Bloemfontein. Neither de Wet nor his officers could prevent the flight of the burghers who did not wait for the British to commence shelling. In the words of de Wet: 'A panic seized my men.'

The flanking movement was too slow. Despite the week's rest the horses were jaded due to the lack of forage and the march itself so that French could not get closer to the enemy than three miles. The horse artillery was similarly affected by the fatigue of the teams. When the Highlanders reached the trenches on the north bank of the river the cooking pots were still boiling on the fires.

General de Wet wrote: 'It was fortunate that the English advance was not more rapid. Soon every position was evacuated. There was not even an attempt to hold them, though some of them would have been almost impregnable. It was such a sight I had never seen before and shall never see again.'

In the Poplar Grove action the British losses amounted to 5 killed and 50 wounded. Corporal P. J. English, of the New South Wales Mounted Rifles, received special mention in despatches by Lord Roberts. In civil life English was a constable stationed at Darlinghurst Police Station in Sydney. At Poplar Grove under heavy fire he brought Trooper R. T. Munro in to a place of safety. Munro lay wounded on a clear stretch of level ground when English went back to him on foot. Lifting him up he carried the wounded man for nearly a mile until out of danger. A strongly built man of 6 feet 3 inches in height and more than 13 stone, English was a well-known athlete in Sydney.

About this time Corporal English and Trooper E. G. Ward, also a constable from Sydney, went out scouting. They tethered the horses near the foot of a kopje. On returning they found that the horses had strayed. So the disconsolate troopers had no alternative other than to walk back to camp. On the outskirts of the camp they came upon horse lines from which, without bothering to ask questions, they calmly culled two of the very best looking animals. Highly satisfied, the two rode on to their own lines. Unfortunately the horses belonged to no less a person than Lord Roberts. In a brief court-martial the Sydney constables were honourably acquitted.

The flight of the burghers came to a halt 20 miles east of Poplar Grove

along a line of ridges marked by the farms of Abrahams' Kraal and Driefontein, both slightly to the south of the Modder. De Wet wrote: 'With great difficulty I persuaded them to stay.'⁵

The British attacked on the morning of 10 March. Near Abrahams' Kraal lying closest to the Modder the enemy was held all day while the main attack was directed at the Driefontein kopjes a few miles to the south. With the Boer flank resting somewhere along the Modder River north of Abrahams' Kraal, the New South Wales Mounted Rifles under Captain Antill carried out a reconnaissance to determine the extent of Boer positions. They succeeded in drawing the enemy's fire but in doing so Trooper W. J. Abrahams was killed by a shot fired from a farmhouse which was flying the white flag of neutrality. In Abrahams' pocket his mates found an unopened letter from his mother that he had not yet had time to read. It had been received that morning. Abrahams was only 19 years old. He was buried where he fell just as the sun was setting behind the hills.

When the battle began the New South Wales Lancers and the Australian Horse were attached to Colonel Porter's Cavalry Brigade facing the Boer right flank. Just before midday the two Australian squadrons were ordered to co-operate with Brigadier-General R. G. Broadwood's brigade on the Boer left flank. Later they pushed on with the cavalry around the Boer position towards the Bloemfontein Road at the rear of the Rietfontein kopjes, near an isolated farmhouse. At this point they were recalled after coming under gun and pom-pom fire.

At Driefontein near the centre of the Boer position 4,000 burghers with a few guns stayed resolutely all day under artillery bombardment and probing infantry advances. From ground gained during the day the soldiers made a heavy assault on the Driefontein kopjes just before sunset. The burghers retired under the falling mantle of darkness. General de Wet said they 'were blindly fleeing before the enemy'. They fell back so quickly that the pursuing British squadrons—including the New South Wales Lancers and the Australian Horse—riding out of condition and exhausted horses were unable to engage them before nightfall. The men bivouacked near the lone farmhouse on the Bloemfontein Road behind Rietfontein.

The British casualties for the day were 426, including 82 killed. The losses were mainly those of the Welsh, Essex and Gloucester Regiments in driving the enemy from the Rietfontein positions. The New South Wales Army Medical Corps worked through the night helping to gather the wounded from the scattered field.

Toward the close of the day when the guns were pounding the Driefontein kopjes, Lieut-Colonel C. E. Umphelby, a Victorian Special Service Officer, received a mortal wound. Umphelby's duties that day lay in assisting the

⁵ C. R. de Wet, *Three Years War*.

movement of the batteries and carrying despatches. Late in the afternoon the guns were advanced into a hollow on the veldt at a range of about 1,000 yards which took them well within rifle range of marksmen on the kopje facing the hollow.

Colonel Umphelby was sitting on an ant hill, the horse reins limply resting in the crook of his arm. While scanning the kopje with field glasses he was hit by a Mauser bullet. Umphelby was removed for treatment to a bell-tented field hospital a mile and a half to the rear. When the lack of transport caused many of the wounded to be left behind in nearby farm-houses following the general advance, Umphelby was sent four miles back by bullock wagon to a farmhouse situated near water. There many of the wounded were left, with 10 days provisions, in the care of medical officers and orderlies. The move left Colonel Umphelby in such an exhausted condition that he failed to respond to medical care. They buried him near the farmhouse. Six weeks later the body was exhumed by the order of Lord Roberts and reinterred in the cemetery at Bloemfontein.

In the absence of a suitable defensive position the Boers retreated 36 miles to Bloemfontein. Preparations were made to defend a low range of hills situated at the south-west approaches to the town. The hills were not more than four miles out. On the morning of 12 March when the army approached from the west the Boers could be seen on the hills to the east. In the afternoon the New South Wales Lancers advancing with the cavalry had some anxious moments under fire after stopping to cut wire fences. At dusk the field batteries silenced a pom-pom on the hills and the Boers quickly abandoned the posts.

At 4.30 a.m. on 13 March Royal Engineers guided by a local man blew up a railway culvert on the north side of the town and cut the telegraph wires. Only a few burghers stayed on the hills overlooking the town during the night. When the British artillery opened up on the morning of 13 March the burghers who remained soon left the scene. The town was within easy artillery range and the mounted squadrons found no opposition.

Two miles outside Bloemfontein the Mayor and officials presented Lord Roberts with the keys of the town. For the soldiers a long and trying march had ended. They had marched for a month without tents and on short rations all the way. They had been exposed to extremes of heat by day and cold by night interspersed with periods of soaking rain. They constantly pressed, harassed and defeated the enemy whenever they met him over miles of open rolling veldt and the low kopjes of the Orange Free State.

Arriving in Bloemfontein a tired and tattered lot the troops left lying along the way the carcasses of no less than 2,000 horses that had died of sheer exhaustion and short rations. Major Bridges reported: 'I have no doubt our losses in horses would have been much less, and our pace more rapid, had

regular halts been made, and when we reached good grazing, the horses allowed to graze for 15 minutes.'⁶

Trooper Samuel Ball, New South Wales Mounted Rifles, wrote from Bloemfontein: 'It is quite a usual thing to see dead horses here. At present there are more than 300 carcasses in one heap, besides others scattered over the farm. As they were valued at £40 a head on an average, the loss represents quite a few "quids". There are now 1,200 sick horses on this farm and on an average half a dozen die daily.'

Having entered the capital of the Orange Free State Roberts was well on the way to achieving his first objective, for the war had at least been carried into the territory of the Republics. Meanwhile the most pressing requirements for remounts, supplies and equipment forced Roberts to tarry in Bloemfontein.

N. T. Seccombe, a trooper in the Queensland Mounted Infantry, described the march to Bloemfontein in the following way: 'Advancing at the rate of about 10 miles a day, we were cut down to half rations, three biscuits a day—very hard—half a pound of tinned beef and one quart of tea.' Sometimes he dreamt of a square meal but went on to say: 'The poor wretches, horses and mules, that die by the wayside would soften the heart of the hardest. Last night we had a nice trudge to a farm about 4 miles from here. We camped and received orders to come back to camp at five in the afternoon. In the meantime a thunder storm gave us its contents and also rained on us for the rest of the night. We could not ride as our horses were too low in condition. So we led them and fell over ant hills and down ferret holes until we were a mass of mud. We got to camp at 9 p.m.

'I had one day's sickness at Paardeberg from drinking impure water and thought I was going to die. A large number of us were in the same plight. We narrowly missed the honour of capturing Steyn, as he passed across country only two hours ahead. I contend I saw his bodyguard getting around a kopje miles away, but our officer thought otherwise.'

Corporal J. H. M. Abbott serving with the Australian Horse wrote: 'The day we captured Bloemfontein I had nothing for 30 hours but half a corn cob and a biscuit.'

In the weeks ahead Captain D. H. Jenkins of the Second Victorian Contingent, commenting on the attitude of the citizens of Bloemfontein towards the troops said: 'Lord Roberts is here with between 50,000 and 60,000 troops and we are going to have a general advance in a few days. This town has 5,000 inhabitants and the streets are very good, containing some fine buildings. The Parliament House has been turned into a hospital. Some of

⁶ *Official Records of the Australian Military Contingents to the War in South Africa* (1911), compiled and edited for the Department of Defence by Lt-Col P. L. Murray.

the ladies of Bloemfontein have been very kind to our sick, but all the residents resent the Australians taking part in the war thinking it should not have concerned us.

'One of them said to me: "I cannot understand you coming to this horrid war. I hate you, as an Australian you had no right to take part in the war." The men bear us strong hatred. They intend fighting till the bitter end, and will not listen to any peace overtures.'

CHAPTER 9

The relief of Ladysmith

In the weeks following the battle of Colenso the army in Natal steadily increased in strength. Reinforced by the arrival of the 5th Division, led by Lieut-General Sir Charles Warren, the force totalled 30,000 men, with eight field batteries and ten naval guns. It was a well equipped army with traction engines capable of moving at 5 miles an hour and especially useful for hauling wagons out of the mud. Long poles were transported and erected along the line of march to extend the telegraph lines as the communications lengthened another 17 miles.

General Sir Redvers Buller prepared to make his second attempt to cross the Tugela. The new plan was similar to the one discarded earlier for the straight-out attack on Colenso kopjes except that Buller decided to move headquarters and staff close to where the crossing was to take place—on the drifts about 16 miles to the west of Colenso village.

After days of heavy rain the army commenced to move on 10 January over roads that were simply quagmires, presenting many difficulties to the slow-moving wagons. Along the heights across the river the Boers watched from their vantage points the slow purposeful approach over the plain of the oncoming army.

Riding ahead with the Mounted Brigade General Lord Dundonald occupied the village of Springfield and the nearby Spearman's Hill. This hill, 700 feet high, formed two spurs known to the army as Mount Alice and Naval Gun Hill overlooking the river at Potgieter's Drift. Troopers of the South African Light Horse carried out a daring raid to release a ferry moored on the distant bank. Six volunteers with their own officer, Lieutenant Carlisle, swam the river. Working under heavy fire they cut the rope hawser and succeeded in bringing the ferry to the southern bank.

Buller carefully studied the scene from Mount Alice. Three miles beyond the northern bank of the river was a section of the same heights he had faced at Colenso. Westward they formed a spur of the main Drakensberg Range. With the dominant feature of Spion Kop on his immediate left and Vaal Krantz to his right, Buller decided from the picture before him against making a direct attack.

Accordingly, he instructed General Sir Charles Warren to report on Trichardt's Drift 4 miles upstream. Acting on the report, Buller sent Warren marching towards Trichardt's Drift on the night of 16 January with 15,000 men and six batteries. While Warren marched Buller stayed at Springfield with the balance of the army.

On the late afternoon of the 16th, under artillery cover, infantry from General Lyttelton's brigade waded the river at Potgieter's Drift with the assistance of a cable strained from bank to bank, meeting with small opposition apart from occasional sniping. Making good use of the repaired ferry throughout the night, sufficient men and guns were across by morning. It was the first crossing of the Tugela made by the Natal Army.

From early morning naval guns and howitzers maintained a barrage on the Boer positions on the heights. The whole purpose of the operations at Potgieter's was to provide the cover necessary to convince the enemy that this was a major attack, whereas Warren with the main column moving under the secrecy of night carried orders to launch the main assault from Trichardt's Drift.

Soon after midnight this column halted at Trichardt's Drift and stayed without movement until after dawn. Selecting a site for a pontoon bridge the engineers worked without interruption from the enemy. Crossing the river at 8 a.m. the Imperial Light Horse faced sniper fire from a nearby farmhouse. By noon the passage began over two pontoons, each spanning 86 yards. The day ended quietly with the bridgehead secured by brigades stationed 1,600 yards from the river.

The proceedings at the drift were closely followed by Boer observers on Spion Kop. The main body of the Mounted Brigade did not make the crossing until late in the afternoon but at no time during the day was there a serious attempt at reconnaissance or any attempt to ascertain the Boer

strength on the heights in front of the drift. Warren never learned that at any time from dawn until the early afternoon the hills immediately beyond the drift could have been taken with little opposition.

Warren hastened slowly. Rather than send the mounted troops across early in the day and instead of having rapidly-slung lines span the river for the infantry to pass, he waited until two pontoons were completed and ready.

Meanwhile the information relayed by enemy observers on Spion Kop coupled with some relaxing of the Potgieter's Drift demonstration convinced the Boer command that the main threat was from Trichardt's Drift. Concealed from the British by the crest of the range the commandos began to concentrate along Rangeworthy Heights opposite the drift.

All the next day until late at night Warren kept himself fully occupied personally supervising the transport until every one of the 15 miles of wagons came safely across to the north bank. On the same day—18 January 1900—without consulting Warren the Mounted Brigade under Dundonald turned left from the drift following a road running in front of the heights for a distance of 7 miles. The troopers defeated a patrol of 250 burghers and took prisoners. Again exceeding orders Dundonald reached the hills overlooking Acton Homes in the afternoon.

The importance of Acton Homes was that it lay where the roads from the Orange Free State and the Natal roads south of Ladysmith met. Dundonald had reached the western end of the Rangeworthy Heights. Below him was the road running through Acton Homes towards the plain leading to Ladysmith. Dundonald knew the situation was one of promise but his request that afternoon for the despatch of artillery and infantry support fell on unreceptive ears. The guns and infantry were not forthcoming. The next morning Warren recalled part of the mounted force back to the bridgehead to guard the grazing oxen. The rest of Dundonald's force he immobilised by withholding the rations.

Buller's instructions to Warren were that once across the river 'you should continue throughout refusing your right and throwing your left, till you gain the open plain north of Spion Kop'.¹ The road from the drift turned sharply left. A mile and a half further on a road known as the Rosalie Farm-Fairview Farm road went away to the right. This route offered the most direct road to Ladysmith, being 8 miles shorter than the Acton Homes road.

Although longer, the road to Acton Homes was favoured by the fact that the Boer right rested somewhere along the heights between the drift and Acton Homes. Once the British were on the road in the rear of the enemy position leading to the open plain, the Boer line down to Potgieter's Drift would become untenable. The way would be open for Lyttelton's

¹ Buller's Despatches to Lord Roberts, Feb 1900.

brigade to cross the heights by the Brakfontein road from Potgieter's Drift with the pressure from the enemy already relaxed. At the junction of the roads the two columns would link up only 9 miles from Ladysmith. The success of the strategy depended on a rapidity of movement by Warren's column capable of flanking the Boer defences along Rangeworthy Heights.

When Warren at last began the march from Trichardt's Drift on the morning of 19 January he had already lost the initiative that his sudden appearance on the south bank over two days earlier had given him as the burghers used the time to lengthen their lines. They now waited ready in entrenchments extended along the heights.

Warren's wagons started at 3 a.m. in parallel columns 3 miles long. Shortly afterwards several wagons became bogged in a spruit, congesting the passage and blocking the progress of the columns on the road. Not more than 5 miles were covered before the road began to narrow, necessitating transit in single file. Warren decided to turn back. That night his army camped only 2 miles from the drift near the point from which it had started in the morning. The burghers watching from the hills in the background reacted to the events of the day by taking no part, other than as interested spectators.

That evening Warren assembled his senior officers to place before them a revised plan. He rejected the Acton Homes road on the grounds that it was too long, involving an undue loss of time and creating problems relating to rations and supply. Three days had gone by without any real progress being made away from the drift. Only one day's rations were left on the wagons so more supplies were called for as Warren prepared to attack on the direct Trichardt's Drift—Rosalie Farm road, running within 2,000 yards of the commanding eminence on the range called Spion Kop.

In this area 2,000 Boers led by Botha held a line over a 3-mile front along the summit of the Rangeworthy Heights, also called Tabanyama, about 1,000 feet above the river. Their right ended on a spur known as Bastion Hill. Their left rested on Green Hill, divided only from Spion Kop by a narrow valley. Along this sector Warren, after notifying Buller of his intentions, launched a frontal attack.

At 3 a.m. on 20 January with the full support of the guns two infantry brigades moved in against the Boer left, entrenching themselves on a low spur known as Three Tree Hill. The main Boer position was separated from the British by a long rising rocky slope completely bare of cover. Any attempt to advance across and up such a terrain must invite disaster.

Before midday an assault on the Boer right directed up through deep gullies came to a halt in mid-afternoon where the cover ended at the head of the gullies. An open slope ran ahead right up to the crest line manned by the Boers. In anticipation of a final charge the artillery doubled the rate

of fire until Warren called off the attack that seemed to have little prospect of success, and which must have claimed many lives. Already the casualties were about 300.

On the extreme right of the Boer position the dismounted South African Light Horse scaled the steep sides of Bastion Hill, an underfeature of the true summit of the range, about 800 feet above the plain. They dislodged a small force of burghers near the crest. Corporal Tobin, a sailor, gaining the highest point on the spur, stood on the skyline in a moment of triumphant abandon waving his hat to the troops below. At that moment he became the target for every type of fire, fortunately without a single bullet finding the mark. However, the very next day Tobin was killed.

Reinforced by Colonel A. W. Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry the troopers proceeded to pour in an awkward fire on the advanced Boer defences in the sector, forcing them to retire. When Botha brought up a gun to a nearby spur called Plat Kop a shell killed Major Childe of the South African Light Horse. In the face of concentrated fire the Uitlanders entrenched themselves and hung on until relieved in the early hours of the following morning.

A trooper in the South African Light Horse, Arnold Brissender from Melbourne, wrote: 'Some of the 13th Hussars and four squadrons of our South African Light Horse were ordered to take a certain hill. We charged up a hill, but when halfway dismounted and charged on foot. At the bottom the Hussars and "B" squadron of the South African Light Horse went elsewhere; our "F" squadron kept going on alone under a murderous fire. The first shell killed our Major and one trooper and wounded six others.

'The rifle fire was terrible. I do not know how many of us got through, but 34 reached the top of that hill. Looking at the place afterwards I wondered how ever we did it. Lord Dundonald who commanded our left flank told us the order had been a mistake, but he was proud of us. Winston Churchill, the hero of the armoured train attack, was with us on the hill. He is as game as a bantam and full of fun.'

Trooper J. J. Ferris also served in the ranks of Colonel Byng's South African Light Horse on the Tugela front. Johnny Ferris was an international cricketer, and the greatest of all Australian left arm bowlers.

Fred Robinson, from Maitland, a volunteer stretcher bearer in the Natal Ambulance Corps was killed close to the front line on 20 January. A resident of Kimberley for some years, he had left his wife and children in Durban before going to the front.

Overnight on 20 January the soldiers along the entire front bivouacked on the ground they had gained in the gullies and behind rocks on the slopes.

Having escaped to Lourenco Marques after being held a prisoner in Pretoria, correspondent Winston Churchill managed to accompany the

troops into the front line as he had persuaded Sir Redvers Buller to give him a commission as a lieutenant in the South African Light Horse without pay. This is how Churchill described the fighting on the following days in the columns of the *London Morning Post*:

'On the 21st the action was renewed. Hart and Woodgate's brigades on the right made good and extended their lodgments, capturing all the Boer trenches of their first defensive line along the edge of the plateau. To the east of Bastion Hill there runs a deep re-entrant which appeared to open a cleft between the right and centre of the Boer position. The tendency of General Hildyard's action with five battalions and two batteries on the British left this day was to drive a wedge of infantry into this cleft, and so split the Boer position in two. But as the action developed the great strength of the second line of defence gradually revealed itself. It ran along the crest of the plateau for about 1,000 yards from the edge, in a series of beautiful smooth grassy slopes of concave surface, forming a veritable glacis for the musketry of the defence to sweep. The defence line consisted of a line of low rock and earth redoubts and shelter trenches, apparently provided with overhead cover cleverly arranged to command approaches with fire, often cross fire, and sometimes with converging fire.

'Throughout the 21st as during the 20th the British artillery, consisting of six field batteries and four howitzers, the latter of tremendous power, bombarded the Boer position, ceaselessly firing on each occasion 3,000 shells. They failed to silence the musketry, to clear the trenches, or to reach the Dutch artillery which did not number more than seven or eight guns and two maxim guns.

'On the 22nd and 23rd the troops held the positions they had won although subjected to harassing shell fire from either flank.'

The battle had reached a stalemate. Buller who ever since the morning of the crossing at Trichardt's Drift had been a constant visitor to the front rode over once again, on the morning of 22 January, to express his complete dissatisfaction with the handling of the whole enterprise. Warren wanted to continue the bombardment for several more days before renewing the infantry attack. To this Buller would not agree. He told Warren that he must attack at once or withdraw beyond the Tugela. Buller again suggested attacking the Boer right by working around Bastion Hill but Warren remained cool to the proposal.

In the course of the heated discussion Warren mentioned that Spion Kop should be taken. To this alternative proposal Buller quickly agreed before riding back to his headquarters on Spearman's Hill. That evening Warren met his commanders to confirm the decision to attack Spion Kop. The assault against Spion Kop was in reality a hasty compromise arising out of a disagreement between the Commander-in-Chief in Natal and the

Second-in-Command. Major-General Sir Edward Woodgate was chosen to lead the troops making the assault.

The outline of Spion Kop in the centre of the Boer line ran east and west for over two miles. The main summit rose 1,400 feet above the river on the western end. At the eastern end only slightly lower than the summit rested two peaks known as Twin Peaks. The main summit formed a rocky and irregular plateau running for about 700 yards from east to west and about half that in depth. At an elevation of 130 feet below the main plateau a ridge ran north-west for 1,000 yards. It ended by rising to form a small kopje known as Conical Hill, only 87 feet below the main summit. From there the contour dropped away to the plain although linked on one side by a long nek with the eastern end of Rangeworthy Heights.

In the late afternoon of 23 January the troops assembled in a gully near the foot of Three Tree Hill, before marching to the base of a long spur running south-west from the summit of Spion Kop. The climb began shortly before midnight guided by Colonel Thorneycroft who with 198 of his Uitlanders, now dismounted and without their spurs, had been chosen to lead the way. Behind them came Woodgate and his staff, then the Lancashire Fusiliers, Royal Lancasters and South Lancasters—all told 1,700 men.

The column moved up slowly in drizzling rain over ground which except for the loose stones was reasonably easy at first but soon became rougher and steeper to climb. Trooper R. L. Nicholls, an Australian in the ranks of Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry, wrote: 'In some places we had to climb on hands and knees, in others we had to clasp hands and help each other as well as we could.'

Every man carried a day's rations. Each engineer carried a pick and shovel, some also carried crow-bars. The column also took five mules loaded with tools to ease the load. Unfortunately the piles of sandbags stacked near the starting point ready to be taken up to the top of the mountain were left behind.

As the summit was approached the column deployed to the right with more of the mounted infantrymen moving up into the front line as the spur broadened and flattened into the breast of the mountain. A second line of mounted infantry followed ahead of the regular infantry. Closer to the crest a thick mist enveloped and dampened the khaki-clad men. About 20 yards from the top every man in Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry forming the leading lines flung himself to the ground when a sharp challenge from a Boer picket rang out from above, followed by the emptying of Mauser magazines into the darkness of the mountainside below. The Boer patrol hurriedly retired. The number of burghers on the Kop was less than 100. Only one man fell to the bayonet.

At 3.30 a.m. by a pre-arranged signal the men gave three echoing cheers to the troops below and indicating to Headquarters that the mountain was taken. The thick mist prevented any visual form of signalling. The British gunners immediately began shelling the nek connecting with Rangeworthy Heights in an attempt to prevent the burghers counter-attacking from that point.

The only detailed order carried by Woodgate was to entrench on the summit. Later he expected guns to be hauled up. The primary intention was to construct a trench close to the northern crest, against which a counter-attack could be expected. Woodgate's dilemma began with a complete lack of knowledge concerning the true formation of the plateau. He had neither a sketch of the formation nor a verbal description of it. Not a single man in the entire force assembled on the mountain that morning had the slightest idea of how the ground lay around or ahead of him and under the thick blanket of mist it was difficult to see.

The impetus of the charge carried the men well across the plateau. On an alignment which they imagined to be close to the north crest the engineers marked out trenches with a tape. Three hours work produced nothing better than a shallow trench bent like a boomerang going east and west for several hundred yards. In the rough stony ground where scanty soil covered solid rock the standard army trenching tool, the Wallace Spade, proved just too weak and light for the job. They were also in short supply and many of the crow-bars required for levering the large stones out had been cast aside on the way up.

In front of the trenches the men built low ramparts about 18 inches high with stones from the surface around and from the loosened stones and soil taken from the trenches, providing a minimum of protection in the direction from whence they felt an attack could be expected. The lack of much needed sandbags in the construction of the small breastworks had already become evident. No exploratory attempts to find out more about the nature of the plateau seem to have been attempted while the men concentrated on the digging of the trenches.

Towards 7 a.m. the mist cleared momentarily revealing the true northern crest. It lay between 200 yards forward on the left and about 50 yards on the right. The main trench was shown to be approximately in the centre of the plateau running along the highest point of the summit. When the mist came down again the men quickly pushed forward to construct another trench but found the ground even harder than on the first site. At the same time Boer riflemen began firing from advanced positions having gained the correct range in the temporary lifting of the mist. The soldiers nearest the crest took cover behind the largest and most suitable rocks.

Woodgate sent Colonel C. àCourt down the mountain to Warren to say that they were entrenched and that all was well. A party of engineers had already gone back along the spur to make the way easier on the more difficult sections of the track for the guns expected to arrive on the plateau later in the day.

Meanwhile the Boer gunners waited impatiently, with their guns trained ready, waiting for the mist to lift. Soon after 8 o'clock it lifted rapidly. Under the revealing light of the blue sky the full danger of the position became clear to the soldiers as with the lifting of the mist a most deadly rifle fire and artillery bombardment rained upon the plateau from a wide arc. The first salvoes heralded an ordeal that was to continue throughout the day until dark.

About an hour after the onslaught began General Woodgate received a mortal wound when he stood without cover to investigate the progress of a party of burghers coming up the steep western side. The command fell to Lieut-Colonel M. S. Crofton, the next senior officer on the mountain. Crofton presently dictated a flag signal which by the time it reached Warren carried an even stronger message than he intended: 'Reinforce at once or all is lost. General dead,' it read. The signal so received had been altered in transmission by an interpolation as the words 'all is lost' were not those of Crofton. General Woodgate lingered on for another two months. He was buried at Mooi River.

The receipt of this message roused Warren from the sense of complacency engendered by the arrival of àCourt: 'Hold on to the last', he answered. 'No Surrender!' Warren then immediately sent two companies of the Imperial Light Infantry and a battalion from each of the Dorset and Middlesex Regiments under Major-General J. T. Coke, a lame veteran with almost 50 years army service.

On the summit the battle continued without abating. The men defending the small advanced posts near the northern crest were more than once wiped out after hanging on as long as they could. The positions were taken again by counter-attacks from the main trench. In the close and sometimes hand-to-hand fighting there seemed to be no planned direction. The soldiers fought in spontaneous bursts stimulated by the will for survival. Often no more than a few yards separated Briton from Boer as they sought cover behind the big black rocks scattered irregularly over the plateau.

Although the soldiers could contend with the burghers who came to contest the plateau, they could do nothing in the face of the strong rifle and gun fire that rained on them from the surrounding hills. By 11.45 a.m. the main trench had become the front line. In some places the large number of dead and wounded congested the firing line and hampered the defenders.

The defenders received no respite from any quarter. From Conical Hill away out in front continuous fire from the Mausers found its mark. From

the hills on the right and left flanks they were exposed to both gun and small-arms fire. Nothing was more murderous than the Mausers at point-blank range from Aloe Knoll raking the main trench held on the right flank by the Lancashire Fusiliers. Louis Botha later said he found 70 men there all of whom were shot in the right temple.

Before the day was over a fearful price was extracted for the early failure to discover and occupy Aloe Knoll, only 450 yards from the main trench, as the Knoll was occupied by the Carolina commando only shortly before the mist lifted. The Knoll in the hands of the British would have enabled them to cover the main body of burghers advancing up the eastern slopes of the plateau. The incessant hail of metal on the plateau ceased only in the brief intervals directed by the Boer signallers for the purpose of allowing the burghers to launch a ground attack on the trenches.

When Buller on Spearman's Hill heard that Woodgate had fallen he telegraphed Warren to suggest that Colonel Thorneycroft take over command on the summit. àCourt had impressed Buller in reporting how Thorneycroft had inspired everyone by the example of his fighting qualities from the beginning of the battle.

Shortly after midday when he lay in the main trench with his mounted infantry a messenger crawled along to inform Thorneycroft that he was officially in command of the entire summit, with the temporary rank of Brigadier-General. Unfortunately, as mentioned earlier, when Warren received the telegraph from Buller that resulted in Thorneycroft's promotion he had already sent Major-General Talbot Coke, who was by this time toiling slowly up the mountain. As senior officer Coke would have automatically superseded Crofton. Completely unaware of Warren's heliographed order to the summit, Coke actually went through the day without knowing of Thorneycroft's promotion. In the confusion of the battle on the uneven terrain close to the summit or on the plateau, where the slightest movement or exposure could prove fatal, communications were limited all day. Thorneycroft's decision to stay in the main trench in the front line of the battle rather than to take up the command post established by Woodgate near the southern crest, behind the shelter of rocks, must have been a contributing factor to the confusion over the command that existed for the rest of the day.

In the early afternoon the Boer ground attack developed from the north-eastern section in front of Aloe Knoll. Six hundred burghers by taking advantage of the cover of rocks and boulders fell upon the section of the trench where the Fusiliers had already lost so heavily in officers and men. Overcome by the weight of the assault some of the soldiers raised white handkerchiefs, the beginning of a considerable surrender movement.

At this stage Thorneycroft rushed across from the main trench in the

centre of the plateau towards a point where a group of burghers and British troops were gathered. Already 150 men were heading down the hill in surrender when Thorneycroft, a big man more than 18 stone and over 6 feet tall, arrived on the scene. In Thorneycroft's own words: 'I got up and shouted to the leader of the Boers, that I was the Commandant here, and that there was no surrender. "Take your men back to hell, sir! There's no surrender here," I yelled.' By the strength of his anger and the very audacity of his deed he bluffed burgher and Britisher alike. No stranger incident occurred in the war. Amazingly the burghers stood aside while Thorneycroft led the hesitant Fusiliers back to the cover of some rocks.²

He had hardly done so when reinforcements from the Middlesex Regiment arrived from the rear. Without delay Thorneycroft organised a counter-attack with his own Mounted Infantry, the Fusiliers and the Middlesex men. In a fierce bayonet charge they not only regained the lost section of the trench but sent the burghers reeling back below the crest. The bulky figure of Thorneycroft, conspicuous everywhere in repelling raids and setting up counter-attacks, had turned the tide of the battle by timely intervention in one dramatic period when the whole British line seemed in danger of folding up.

Later in the afternoon the Boers again applied pressure to the British right, the most serious threat being the attempt to outflank it by way of the ledge along the rear of the spur connecting the summit with Aloe Knoll. The opportune arrival of the Scottish Rifles and Bethune's Mounted Infantry thwarted the efforts of the burghers. The plateau on the summit and the immediate southern ledges were by this time congested with soldiers. Botha gave up the idea of taking the summit that day by ground assault. He concentrated on blasting the troops off the mountain by artillery bombardment.

When Lyttelton at Mount Alice, in response to a signal from the summit, despatched the Scottish Rifles and Bethune's Mounted Infantry, he also sent on his own initiative a battalion of the King's Royal Rifles to attack Twin Peaks, situated to the east of Aloe Knoll. The crossing of the river by Kaffir's Drift between Potgieter's and Trichardt's Drifts and the scaling of the steep and rocky tree-lined peaks and the nek between was entirely successful. When the Peaks were taken by 5 o'clock the Rifles held a position with possibilities of being extended along the length of the ridge to Aloe Knoll.

When Buller learned that the Rifles were on the way to attack Twin Peaks he rejected the plan on the grounds that it was an isolated movement. At first his repeated order to recall the battalion went unheeded. Towards sunset the troops were digging in on the position they had won when

² Thorneycroft's report to General Buller, Feb 1900.

Buller's authority prevailed. In the falling darkness they retired. Slowly retracing their steps unmolested, they recrossed the Tugela by midnight. In a few hours a splendid opportunity was brilliantly gained and reluctantly relinquished at the cost of 90 men killed and wounded.

On the summit the artillery bombardment continued until nightfall. Right through the long hours of a summer's day in temperatures exceeding 100 degrees Fahrenheit on the bare mountain top the lack of water added to the sufferings of the men in the trenches. Water was taken up along the bumpy spur almost to the southern crest in biscuit tins but because of the heavy curtain of shells on the plateau none reached the front line. The men could only get to the water by crawling through the barrage. The British artillery failed to quieten the Boer guns all day. From their position on Mount Alice the 4.7-inch naval guns alone had the range to reach the enemy guns. By changing the position of single guns the Boer artillery kept unscathed all day.

A naval gunner had this to say: 'From our position on Mount Alice the view was magnificent when we had time to admire it. No matter which way we looked it was hills everywhere. Below us ran the Tugela, in the most fantastic windings, studded with trees and bits of ploughed land here and there. The great dongas and water courses coming from the hills present to the eye a scene of wonderful beauty. The valley between us and Spion Kop we named the Valley of Death. The roar of the cannon was terrible. The sight was grand. For you to understand the position better, I must tell you that the side of Spion Kop towards us was about a mile long.'

Apart from the despatching of reinforcements, the appointing of Thorneycroft and the slow gathering of supplies at the base of the mountain in readiness for the consolidation of the position on the summit for the following day, Warren made only one positive but tragic contribution to the battle. Unfortunately the location of his wagon headquarters below Three Tree Hill did not allow him a full view of the Spion Kop range. The entire eastern half, including Aloe Knoll and Twin Peaks, was lost to Warren's view, obscured by the western face of the main summit. Therefore when he saw the shells from the naval guns bursting over Aloe Knoll and under the impression that the guns were shelling his own men he hurriedly sent a telegraph message to stop the firing. He was completely unaware of the true formation of the summit and of the significance of Aloe Knoll or of the heavy toll being exacted by the burghers who held it.

Because of the fury of the battle intercommunications on the mountain were almost non-existent. Three officers in addition to Thorneycroft believed themselves to be holding command. The misunderstanding prevailed even though the officers concerned were not more than several hundred yards apart but fighting on varying levels. It is sufficient to say

that they knew nothing of the appointment of the junior in rank, Thorneycroft.

Throughout the day communication with headquarters by heliograph or semaphore was frequently broken. In the early morning enemy action forced the signalling station on the south-west spur to retire to the south-eastern side of the mountain. This meant that direct signals could no longer be transmitted to Warren whose wagon was completely unsighted from the new station. From this time all signals were directed to Mount Alice and relayed to Warren by telegraph. In the periods when cloud obscured the sun transmission to Mount Alice from the summit stopped. The flag signallers had difficulty in having their signals read. The result was that few reports of what was happening on the mountain reached Warren and none that was really up to date. At no time during the day did he attempt to go and see for himself.

At 2.30 p.m., when Thorneycroft at last set himself up at the post near the line of boulders used earlier in the day by Woodgate, he wrote a report to Warren which read: 'The enemy's guns are north-west, sweep the whole of the top of the hill. They also have guns east, cannot you bring our artillery fire to bear on north-west guns. If you wish to really make a certainty of hill for night, you must send more infantry and attack enemy's guns.' To this message Thorneycroft received no reply.

On that summer's day soldiers on both sides of the range paused from their normal duties to look to where the life and death struggle was taking place. In beleaguered Ladysmith, 12 miles away, troops defending the hills ringing the town viewed the shells bursting on the Kop with speculative attention. The elevated battleground framed high on the summit was more closely observed in the camps along the Tugela.

Winston Churchill spent the morning engaged in watching through field glasses the dramatic events taking place on the sky-line. In the afternoon, tired of being a distant spectator, he decided to make a closer investigation. In describing the scene that met him when he climbed the spur leading to the summit Churchill wrote: 'Streams of wounded were staggering along, alone or supported by comrades, or crawling on hands and knees or carried on stretchers. Others were utterly exhausted and fell on the hillside in stupor. Others again, seemed drunk, though they had no liquor.'

Dismayed with what he saw and learned, Churchill visited Warren at his headquarters sometime after 6 o'clock. His arrival was unheralded and Warren at first threatened to place under arrest the young correspondent who insisted on having so much to say. Churchill gave the general the first eye-witness account of conditions on the summit since the report from àCourt early in the morning. Warren calmed down and sent Churchill back up the mountain with a message for Thorneycroft.

Nightfall coupled with the cessation of the artillery bombardment and the easing of tension on the plateau gave Thorneycroft time to consider his position. Gathering his senior officers near the ambulance station close to the southern crest he announced his intention to withdraw the entire force from the summit. By 8.45 p.m. the soldiers started to leave.

Ever since the advice of his promotion to the command Thorneycroft had borne the main burden of the defence all day with no other communication from Warren. He knew nothing of the capture and withdrawal on Twin Peaks. He could see that no attempt had been made to relieve the pressure on the mountain by an attack on the neighbouring Rangeworthy Heights with any of the 10,000 troops Warren still had at his disposal.

The enemy's guns were never silenced. They unrelentingly pounded his men while daylight lasted. Thorneycroft stated later in a report to Warren: 'The enemy at 6.30 p.m. were firing heavily from both flanks, with rifles, shell and Nordenfolt, while a heavy rifle fire is kept up in front. It is all I can do to hold my own.'

As far as Thorneycroft knew there was no reason to expect anything different on the following morning. He was certain another day would be more than the men who had fought since early morning could endure. Therefore, without any expectation of guns being dragged up capable of matching the Boer guns and without any provision of adequate cover for his troops, coupled with the absence of water and food, Thorneycroft considered the plateau could not be held.

From Warren's wagon Churchill went off in the darkness up the rough track down which the wounded were threading their way and others were withdrawing. Near the top of the mountain at about 11.30 p.m. Churchill met Thorneycroft: 'I found Colonel Thorneycroft,' he wrote, 'at the top of the mount. Everyone seemed to know, even in the confusion, where he was. He was sitting on the ground surrounded by the remnants of the regiment he had raised, who had fought for him like lions and followed him like dogs.'

Churchill told Thorneycroft of Warren's plans and that the Mountain Battery, capable of being dismantled and carried on the backs of mules, had at last arrived from Frere, 20 miles distant. With the 12-pounder naval guns and the sand-bags this battery was ready to be hauled up from the foot of the mountain. But Thorneycroft could not be persuaded to alter his decision.

Warren meanwhile sent 200 men of the Somerset Light Infantry with picks and shovels. On the mountain side they met Thorneycroft coming down. Thorneycroft was handed a note written by Warren. In the poor light he could not read the handwriting so he handed the note to Churchill who read Warren's instructions to hold on at all costs. The Light Infantry

were to dig improved trenches for the troops. Thorneycroft, physically and mentally worn out beyond further endurance by his heroic efforts, simply strode off into the darkness saying that he had done all he could and was not going back.

Captain W. P. Braithwaite, in command of the Somersets, discussed with his officers whether they should continue on to the summit. He decided that as no troops were left on the plateau it would be useless to carry on any further. In any case he could not have contacted Warren because the oil in the night signalling lamps had run out. In the darkness the spare tins were not found until 2.30 a.m.

Thorneycroft arrived at Warren's headquarters at 2.30 a.m. About the same time General Coke, who did not appear on the main plateau once during the day, also reported to Warren who had recalled him for consultation from the upper slopes of the mountain. At the foot of the mountain Coke wandered for two hours searching in the darkness for Warren's wagon which had been moved several hundred yards. At the time of the appearance of his commanding officers Warren also received after an interval of eight hours a message sent by Thorneycroft at 6.30 p.m.

When Warren heard Thorneycroft's report that the troops had already evacuated the mountain plateau he found himself faced with a situation so unexpected that he could think of no other alternative than to seek the advice of Buller. Here fate intervened again. The message could not be sent by telegraph because of a fault on the line. The wires were silent.

Coke had left 1,600 men on the upper slopes under Captain H. Phillips, who was already signalling for instructions whether he should return to the summit. When at length the courier reached Buller at Mount Alice the period in which the summit might have been reoccupied had passed. The rider missed the track and the ride of only 8 miles took three hours.

When the day ended with the soldiers still holding the plateau the despondent burghers began to leave the front line and return to the laager behind the mountain. Many packed the wagons and started along the road to Ladysmith.

Believing that the British would retire overnight Botha rode desperately from point to point upbraiding the burghers for leaving their posts. He actually stopped some wagons well on the way to Ladysmith. In response to Botha's pleading and protesting many turned back to sleep that night near the foot of the mountain.

At daybreak a handful of burghers from the Carolina Commando, having waited near the fringe of the eastern crest since the fighting stopped, cautiously ventured on the plateau with the intention of recovering some of the bodies of the fallen. To their great astonishment they found themselves alone with the dead and the wounded. In the excitement of the moment

they exultantly waved rifles and hats to the burghers below, even attracting the waverers whose wagons were rumbling along the Ladysmith road. The battle of Spion Kop was won because of the tenacity of Louis Botha without whom the Boers would have been willing to concede defeat.

When Buller rode over to meet Warren it was already 6 o'clock. He immediately assumed command of the entire force, ordering at once a full retreat beyond the Tugela River. Marching in heavy rain that continued to fall for the next two days the army returned across the river under the eyes of an enemy who declined to interfere. In the battle of Spion Kop the British losses were 322 officers and men either killed or died of wounds, more than in any other single day of the war. A further 563 officers and men were wounded and 300 taken prisoner.

The British casualties at Paardeberg on 18 February 1900 are comparable with those at Spion Kop but at Paardeberg the fighting was spread over several miles and the carnage on Spion Kop took place within the confines of a few open acres.

On 25 January, the morning after the battle, a 12-hour truce on the plateau allowed Briton and Boer to bury the dead and to attend the wounded. A Victorian named Alfred Carr, for eight years a grocer on the Rand, wrote: 'We who followed in the wake of the combatants were physically prostrated by the mere exertion of climbing, both during and after the battle. Five hours were occupied in getting down with a man they picked up on the lesser of the two main eminences. Only three of the party of 12 got to the bottom.'

The decision taken by Colonel Thorneycroft to withdraw so soon after the shelling stopped even though a withdrawal would have still been possible at midnight or later may have been one for which he had no authority. Yet it was a step taken by a brave soldier worn out almost to the limit of his endurance by the stress of battle. Unaware of any measures being taken for the defence of the summit the next day he declined to wait any longer for instructions from Warren when none had been forthcoming all day. Having once made the decision he refused to be dissuaded and was too numbed in mind to sound out the Boer position and so discover that the burghers were leaving the field.

Of all the untoward happenings associated with the decision to seize Spion Kop none is more baffling than the neglect to run a cable up the long spur to within at least easy distance of the crest. If this had been done and Warren and Thorneycroft given the means to communicate by telegraph, the decision to vacate the summit may not have been taken.

For weeks past the Telegraph Division had followed closely every forward movement made by the army linking by poles and aerial wires or cable each newly established position. The cable crossed Trichardt's Drift ter-

minating at the wagon serving as Warren's headquarters near Three Tree Hill. No explanation appears to have been given nor does there seem to have been any valid reason why the line was not extended to the upper slopes of the spur used by the troops. The failure to do so is indicative of the almost total lack of planning associated with the assault on Spion Kop.

It is no exaggeration to say that there would have been many hundreds of Australians with the volunteer forces on Spion Kop. The Uitlander ranks of Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry who led the way to the summit on that fateful morning when, in the words of Winston Churchill, 'they fought like lions' must have contained a high percentage of Australians. When the regiment was first raised Lieutenant Phillip, a South Australian serving with 'F' Squadron, wrote: 'Out of 115 men the squadron had got 76 Australians.' The Australians were also numerous in Bethune's Mounted Infantry although by arriving late in the day they saw little fighting. The squadron of Imperial Light Horse also had a quota of Australians within the ranks.

The Imperial Light Infantry, 850 strong on Spion Kop, was in effect entirely a Uitlander force. Two companies of this regiment arrived on the plateau at 10 a.m. They were among the first reinforcements to go in support of the original assault troops, followed at 2 p.m. by every available man in the regiment, led by Lieut-Colonel W. Nash. They were all having their first fight.

The regiment stayed on the plateau until ordered to leave by Thorneycroft. As the men began to move down the mountain, Lieut-Colonel A. Hill of the Middlesex Regiment demanded to know where they were going. It was not until then that Hill, a senior officer, heard for the first time of Thorneycroft's elevation to the command. Convinced that the order to withdraw had no real authority he ordered: 'Not a man or regiment is to leave the field.'

So the men turned back to the positions they had left and placed pickets around the sector. The regiment stayed on in the darkness until somewhere between 3 and 4 o'clock in the morning. No Boers were on the field. The Light Infantry was alone but for the wounded who were moaning and crying for water, of which there was none. In the confusion below the absence of the Light Infantry was for some time unnoticed. The regiment did not begin to leave the summit until the arrival of an order to withdraw signed at 2 a.m. by Brigade-Major J. Bonus. They were the last soldiers to leave. The foot of the mountain was reached without incident.

In his despatches on 30 March General Buller acknowledged the gallantry of the colonials who fought so well on that 24 January alongside the regular soldiers. In references to the Imperial Light Infantry in despatches, Private Hughes and Corporal Pack Weldon were specially mentioned for con-

spicuous gallantry. Hughes was wounded and then returned to the front line. In an individual duel with the Boers among the rocks he was shot no less than five times—in the right arm, the left arm, the throat, the wrist and the chest. Even then some restraint was necessary from those dressing his wounds to prevent him from trying to return to the firing line.

Corporal Weldon, also a Uitlander, was cut off and isolated at his post in front of the main trench. Surrounded by the enemy he refused to surrender. Weldon fought on with the bayonet until killed by a blow on the head. His name is perpetuated on the memorial at Saxonwold in Johannesburg erected to commemorate the men from the Rand who fell fighting against the Boers. Sergeant Jeffries of Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry received mention for conspicuous gallantry for the second time, the first being at Colenso on 15 December.

The names of only a few of the Australians who fought at Spion Kop can be recorded here. Trooper Sheffield, who went up to the plateau with Bethune's Mounted Infantry, had lived for five years in Johannesburg. Trooper Shelley, who left Johannesburg a few weeks before the war broke out, and Trooper H. Wyatt fought with Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry. Trooper R. L. Nicholls (mentioned earlier) from the Melbourne suburb of Toorak, who made a passage from Australia to the front, and Trooper J. V. Kearns also from Victoria both enlisted in Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry. Trooper Lang and Trooper J. Norman were Imperial Light Infantrymen, the former receiving a wound on the knee from a bursting shell. An Imperial Light Infantryman from the Sydney suburb of Paddington, Corporal Tudhope, was also wounded. Trooper Abraham Robinson, a Victorian employed by a mining company on the Rand for 10 years, served with Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry, as did Trooper George Ellis, aged 25 and formerly of Hobart who had lived on the Rand for five years. He was one of the Australians among those who led the way and charged the pickets in the pre-morning mist on Spion Kop. A week later he was fatally wounded.

Trooper Nicholls wrote a letter home in which he described the fighting and the suffering during that long day on Spion Kop: 'As day broke a heavy cloud enveloped the plateau on which we were working, concealing us from the enemy, but even then the Boers found us with a few stray shots. At half-past six the cloud lifted. Then commenced the firing which developed into a perfect inferno. Bullets were coming from all directions, shells hissed overhead, the pom-poms shrieked, shrapnel burst on all sides, and we could seldom see a single Boer. We had to lie still, and reply whenever possible. It was a fearful experience to lie there and unable to reply with effect, exposed to a terrific Boer fire.

'Thorneycroft was here, there and everywhere, regardless of danger.

Thus it went on until the day began to wane. As dusk fell, the Boers increased the violence of their fire, and by this time the sangars had become converted into shambles. The plateau was strewn with dead and dying. The sight was horrible. The different manner in which men mortally wounded waited for the end was a sight never to be forgotten. I saw men with hands clasped in front of them in ardent prayer. Others in the throes of death were blaspheming. It was altogether a horrible revelation of the cruelty of battle.

'After half past twelve I took no active part in the fighting. First of all I was wounded in the thigh, and afterwards a splinter from a shell struck me in the hip. I could still fire, but then I was further wounded in the shoulder and had to lie for eight hours behind a rock until the stretcher bearers found me. I was one of the lucky ones, a number of my comrades were not found until the following day.

'Although the pain from my wounds was severe, the worst suffering was from the want of water. I would have given all I possessed for a drink of water and so would everybody else on the hill. Where I lay was a good point of vantage and I was enabled to follow the fortunes of the fight pretty closely. There were many acts of bravery and devotion to comrades, but they became so numerous they were lost sight of.

'Long before the retirement it was generally felt that during the night the hill would have to be abandoned. Afterwards we discussed the fight over and over again, and the opinion was general that Thorneycroft could do nothing else but retire. Sir Charles Warren was the real man to blame for ever attempting to take Spion Kop. It was an impossible task without guns.'

Trooper Kearns, the son of the Reverend Kearns, wrote telling his father of his experiences with Warren's force, and of that terrible day on Spion Kop. Kearns fought with 'C' Squadron, Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry. He wrote: 'We left Springfield camp and crossed the Tugela. We had to swim our horses over. Two horses of the 13th were drowned in doing so. The Boers I believe were rather astonished to find us over on the other side. The Carbineers surprised a party of Boers and killed and wounded about 50 of them. However, everything was got across, and this led to a fight of five days duration. I was under fire 18 hours. There was a night attack and Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry led the way, supported by a lot of regulars. A charge was made with bayonets. Only two were bayoneted at that time.

'In the morning, however, the Boers had several guns in position, and along with the rifle fire, they killed or wounded quite three-quarters of all the Britishers on that awful ridge. The worst of it was that there wasn't one of our guns that could reach their artillery, while every shell they sent

into our position was accompanied by the groans and shrieks of our wounded and dying men.

'Men were blown to pieces and legs and heads blown off; arms and other parts were lying all over the place, and the trenches were full of blood and mangled corpses. It was such a position that our men could not retreat. Our Captain was shot dead, and afterwards I helped dig his grave and pile stones on it. Lieutenant Ellis, a mine captain from the Village Main Reef, Johannesburg, was killed. Also a mate who was in my sub-section of four, Trooper Ellis of Hobart, is dead and also Trooper Pickersgill from New Zealand. I got to know Ellis and Pickersgill only after joining the Corps and nice fellows they were too. The position could not be held without the sacrifice of many more valuable lives, and so it had to be abandoned.

'So here we are, the whole army is back in Springfield having completely failed to get through to Ladysmith. The Tugela Heights we have to cross make such impregnable positions, and we always have to advance in the open against a foe ready waiting for us. It seems awfully humiliating for all our thousands to come back to Springfield without relieving Ladysmith.

'Everyone of Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry who is left, rode back each one leading a riderless horse. I think we who may get through the war will be martyrs to rheumatism. Most of our time we sleep out in the wet and sometimes with only a mackintosh to warm us and keep out the rain.'

Only 72 out of 198 of Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry returned unwounded across the Tugela. The percentage of casualties ranked higher than any other regiment on Spion Kop.

One young soldier, R. J. Doherty (mentioned earlier) who had missed the troopship at Adelaide, wrote from Springfield 'to express my thankfulness to those who subscribed to pay my passage to the theatre of war. After the battle of Colenso we retired on Frere. At that place I was appointed battery Sergeant-Major of the Colt Gun Section of Bethune's Horse. We next crossed the Tugela with Warren's force on 13 January and continued our march onward to Acton Homes. It is impossible for me to guess the number of killed and wounded as the battle waged all along the underline of Spion Kop for miles. We were at the north end of it, with Lord Dundonald. We had our guns mounted on galloping carriages.'

On 5 February General Buller began his third attempt to break through the Boer line on the Tugela Heights. Two and a half miles downstream from Potgieter's Drift a solitary hill known as Zwarts Kop rose from the river flats. Overlooking the river and the country beyond, Zwarts Kop dominated another hill on the Boer side of the river—Vaal Krantz. The British general reasoned that by seizing Vaal Krantz the Boer trenches on the comparatively low Brakfontein range directly in front could be satisfactorily shelled to enable the infantry to go in and breach the Boer line.

Preceded by a bombardment of 66 guns placed on and around Zwarts Kop the infantry crossed the river by pontoon bridges at Skiet's Drift, trudging undeterred through mealie fields under heavy shelling to the foot of Vaal Krantz. The road from the river led over fairly level ground skirting Vaal Krantz near Munger's Farm before crossing Brakfontein range to Ladysmith. However Vaal Krantz was dominated on both flanks by guns on Twin Peaks in the west and the heights of Doornkop to the east.

In the late afternoon the burghers were driven from the main features of Vaal Krantz but strong gun fire from the flanks covered the hill, immobilising activity and forcing the British to take cover. The next morning, using to advantage grass fires caused by the shelling, 1,000 burghers counter-attacked. The infantry held fast then drove the enemy back at the point of the bayonet. Even so, the shelling from both flanks continued to trouble the troops.

Trooper Fred Marshall, from Gundagai, serving with Bethune's Mounted Infantry said: 'There we encountered a Spion Kop for a second time.'

A reconnaissance by balloon convinced Buller of the true nature of the defences. He now knew that Vaal Krantz could not be properly fortified with guns. 'We were exposed,' he reported to Roberts, 'to the fire of heavy guns posted on heights dominating our artillery.'³ The gunners failed to silence the Boer guns even though direct hits blew up the magazine on Doornkop. Therefore rather than incur heavier losses Buller once again recalled his forces to the southern bank of the river. The infantry brigade holding Vaal Krantz retired overnight on 7 February. By 11 February 1900 the entire army was in camp near the railway at Chieveley, the starting point of four weeks before.

The failure at Vaal Krantz cost the lives of 34 killed, and 335 wounded. Once again the Boer line held because the British general elected to engage with a comparatively small part of his army.

Private Baptist, 'B' Company, 2nd Devonshire Regiment, wrote to his family in Sydney: 'We stayed at Spearman's Camp until Sunday 5 February, when we left for Potgieter's Drift. On Monday we advanced to Vaal Krantz, where we had some very heavy fighting. On 7 February we took a hill from the Boers and whilst our regiment was on the side of it the Boers gave us a merry reception from two sides with big guns and we had to get what cover we could. They kept up the fire all day. The following morning we left.'

The wounded from the actions fought by Warren's force beyond Trichardt's Drift and those from Vaal Krantz were moved straight from the battlefield to the bell-tented No. 4 Field Hospital, pitched on Spearman's Farm. The farm which had been looted by the Boers was surrounded by stone walls in a small valley directly behind the naval guns placed on Mount Alice. In the three weeks from 16 January before the hospital moved back to

³ Buller, in his report to Lord Roberts, 8 Feb 1900.

Chieveley, more than 1,000 men passed through the tented wards. The more severely wounded men were carried 2 miles to the hospital on stretchers. It was the closest that nurses came to the front line in the war.

General Sir Redvers Buller whose crossings of the Tugela River were equalled by as many recrossings was becoming known as 'The Ferryman'. Although he had lost the confidence of many of his officers his popularity with the soldiers remained as firm as ever. In a letter home Trooper Marshall could still refer to him as 'the only Buller'. The men liked the cool manner in which he would often ride within range of the enemy.

In deciding on the fourth attempt to cross the river and breach the Boer line Buller elected to commit his whole army of 27,000 men with 80 guns. For the past two months the Boers on the Fort Wylie kopjes opposite Colenso had gone about gradually strengthening the defences. Whereas the left flank once rested on the high kopje called Hlangwane it now extended several miles farther east.

By careful reconnaissance Buller sought and found the extreme left of the Boer flank resting on Cingolo, one of a chain of kopjes several miles east of Colenso bridge. Because of the sweep northwards taken by the river almost immediately after leaving Colenso the kopjes were situated on the southern bank, a factor that was of the utmost significance. Although Buller was slow to recognise the fact, the kopjes had always been the key to the Boer defences along the Tugela Heights.

The army left Chieveley camp on 14 February 1900. On the same day Dundonald's Mounted Brigade supported by a machine-gun battery captured Hussar Hill, about 3 miles south-east of Colenso, and infantry following up immediately occupied it. By the end of the day the whole Natal Army with the exception of a brigade guarding Chieveley camp had taken up a front about 2 miles along the Boer left flank.

While the infantry rested from marching, artillery on Hussar Hill heavily shelled the adjacent kopjes — Monte Cristo, Green Hill and Cingolo and along the necks linking them. Mounted infantry forced the retirement of the enemy from Cingolo. On the next day the infantry attacked Monte Cristo, a rugged and broken-surfaced kopje with thickly wooded slopes. A simultaneous advance on Green Hill and along the neck between it and Monte Cristo put increased pressure on the burghers.

The day ended with the British holding the left flank positions of the Boer Army, the strongly held Green Hill and large quantities of stores and ammunition. The rolling up of these positions was a necessary prelude before the attack on the highly strategic kopje Hlangwane. To satisfy the thirst of an army exposed to midsummer days of sizzling heat, the water came by supply trains from Chieveley and was carried to the front by cart or wagon in any kind of tank or container that could be found.

Hlangwane rose close to the river about a mile and three-quarters from Colenso. Almost immediately after leaving Colenso the Tugela departs temporarily from a more or less purposeful west to east course by turning sharply north for 4 miles before resuming the normal easterly course towards the sea. The deviation meant that artillery based on the summit of Hlangwane could readily straddle the village of Colenso and the heavily fortified and entrenched kopjes at Fort Wylie. It was the same hill up which Dundonald's colonials had made good progress on the day of the attack on Colenso two months earlier, when their role had been one of keeping the burghers occupied while the main attack took place in front of Fort Wylie. On that day the colonials were recalled after Dundonald had vainly looked for support to take the hill.

Quickly positioning the naval guns on Green Hill Buller bombarded Hlangwane for a day before launching a ground attack. On the evening of 19 February the kopje fell to the infantry. A rearguard action ordered by Botha enabled the Boers to get the guns clear across the river but the possession of Hlangwane gave Buller the key to the relief of Ladysmith which he had been seeking for so long.

Almost immediately the Boer defences near Colenso were evacuated. With both the road and railway bridges spanning the river already demolished Buller constructed a pontoon bridge 100 yards long in front of Hlangwane.

Private Baptist gave an account of the progress of the infantry up to this point: 'On 16 February we started our third and last fight up to now. We left camp and had to drive the Boers off two lovely hills, the first being called Hussar Hill. We advanced up very steadily, the Boers pouring a heavy fire into us. From Hussar they retired to another beautiful hill called Monte Cristo, which we took on 19 February, and if they had been anything of fighting men they could have cleared us all out, but we advanced steadily and, when near the top, fixed bayonets and charged.

'The Boer for a known fact does not like cold steel, so before we could get near them they scooted, leaving everything behind them. We held this hill (Monte Cristo) until another brigade advanced right up through Colenso, at which place we had the fight on 15 December. On the 20th we did not do much, only the artillery, which had a proper duel with them, making them retire. On 21 February we advanced and attacked the hill which they retired from, called Hlangwane, a splendid position too. If the English had this position, it would have been one of the warmest jobs anyone would have liked, to have shifted them. They were entrenched all over with splendid cover for them to retire.'

Covered by the guns on Hlangwane, three infantry brigades made the river crossing on 21 February, the commencement of a week of continuous fighting. Gunner Dowling, an Australian serving with the Natal Naval

Volunteer Force working the guns on Hlangwane, described the bombardment of the Boer defences on the first day of the crossing:

'We have been travelling all over the country with our guns, taking up positions, shelling the enemy, and then moving elsewhere. We won this great battle which will never be forgotten. We started gradually with our guns in the early morning, and by one o'clock in the day we were in full running, having no fewer than 68 guns playing on the Boer positions from the one hill, Hlangwane.

'The roar of the cannon was terrific, not a second being wasted. All the time our infantry and light artillery were advancing, until at 4 p.m. we got the order to ease off. The Boers were rushing from trench to trench, harassed by thousands of our soldiers with fixed bayonets gleaming in the sun. We had to drive the Boers off the hill we occupied before we could fix our guns there. It took us a fortnight to do it.'

Troopers Ackland and J. Fisher, of Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry, were both mentioned in despatches for crossing the Tugela under fire to look for barbed wire in the swollen drift on 21 February.

Trooper J. V. Kearns of Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry rode with the first mounted troops to cross the river. He gave his account of the results that flowed from the capture of Hlangwane: 'Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry were the first to cross the river, scout the country and find out the enemy, and with two of our Maxims keep the enemy employed until the infantry were able to relieve us. Of course we had to swim our horses across. As anyone can see it now, it would have been fruitless to take the Colenso position by a frontal attack. There are trenches by the river and in caves up the kopjes where no shell could ever enter, except by taking them by the right flank, which has been done. It was fun dodging about in the Boer trenches, seeing what we could pick up. I have the smallest pony in the regiment, a beautiful wiry Basuto, but I am at a disadvantage when crossing water, always getting wet up to my knees.'

Trooper G. Buch wrote: 'North Side Tugela River, Colenso—Natal, 23 February. I am writing you this in the Boer trenches, the very places that the Boers fired at the battery that lost 10 guns three months ago. Two days ago we drove the Boers out, and now occupy the trenches ourselves. We have not been under canvas for the last three weeks. You sleep with your head on your saddle for a pillow. I have a very good horse. Sometimes we have to ride 20 miles a time to take up a position. The Rifle Brigade is now storming one of the Boer positions right in front of us. You can see their bayonets flashing in the sun, as they go up the hills, slow but sure. The noise is something terrible.'

The railway from Colenso to Ladysmith followed the arm of the river running south to north. Pieter's Station, the first station beyond Colenso,

stood at the foot of Pieter's Hill, the most easterly point of a long range reaching back to Brakfontein. The Boers, numbering between 4,000 and 5,000, had selected well-prepared positions with concealed gun emplacements in difficult country. They contested every yard as the soldiers edged forward taking trench after trench in a series of hard-fought battles. Early on the Sunday morning of 25 February a truce was arranged to enable the men lying out between the forces to be brought in. Many of the wounded had been exposed to the heat of the sun, parched with thirst and suffering for two days amid the stench from the bodies of the dead. The truce expired at 8 p.m. on 25 February.

When the attack slowed down to a standstill the engineers built a second pontoon bridgehead across the river nearer to Pieter's Hill. On the morning when the news filtered through the ranks of Cronje's surrender at Paardeberg the troops passed over the new bridge and launched a simultaneous attack on key hills over a wide front. Backed by accurate shelling from the guns, trench after trench fell. When Railway Hill and Inniskilling Hill were taken only Pieter's Hill remained in Boer hands. The battle ended at nightfall with the burghers in full flight to beyond Ladysmith.

When Buller after much groping found the way to Ladysmith and put the full weight of his army into the breach the gritty soldiers did not fail him. The combined efforts of regular infantry with well-directed artillery support formed the basis of 13 days sustained pressure that overcame the resistance of the Boers.

On 28 February Dundonald's Mounted Brigade crossing by pontoon advanced beyond Pieter's Station, engaging for some hours a Boer rearguard. At four in the afternoon with the way clear ahead the Imperial Light Horse and Natal Volunteers galloped hard for Ladysmith. The Natal Volunteers were led that afternoon by Major Hubert Gough, a British officer. (In the war of 1914-18, as General Sir Hubert Gough, he commanded the British Fifth Army in France.) Passing in the open beyond Wagon Hill and advancing between Caesar's Camp and Intombi they were cheered by the troops manning the heights. Then as they splashed across the Klip River drift near the outskirts of the town they were welcomed joyously. General Sir George White and his staff greeted them in the main street. Thus ended the siege of 118 days. Dundonald and Winston Churchill arrived in the dark after a 6-mile ride from Nelthorpe. On 3 March, from his headquarters at Nelthorpe, General Sir Redvers Buller made a formal entry into Ladysmith at the head of his battalions.

The fourth and final push for the relief of Ladysmith cost the British 1,893 casualties either killed, wounded or missing. From Chieveley back to Estcourt and beyond to Pietermaritzburg vast tented hospitals sprang up to take the wounded. From Colenso some of the worst cases were carried on

stretchers for some miles to avoid bumping in the ambulances. Mrs Betty Kennedy, a nursing Sister from Melbourne, wrote:

'Our Estcourt Hospital was quite a town in itself. The long rows of tents, the lines brilliantly lit at night with electric light; the operating theatre with every necessary appliance. There was no lack of necessities. But the night work in the wet was trying, passing from tent to tent in the pouring rain; rousing night orderlies, for each case had a special orderly, endeavouring to keep dry and cheerful.

'When the hospital was moved from Estcourt to Pretoria, we had an awful time at first. The camp was set over a place where hundreds of horses had been buried some time before, and we all got ill. It was soon moved again.'

Sister Dora Burgess, a Sydney nurse, wrote from the military hospital at Pietermaritzburg: 'I found my wards full of Dublin Fusiliers, Connaught Rangers and Lancashire Fusiliers. Most of the wounds were small except shell wounds. They burst the flesh open, making a horrid gash. I have a piece of shell which I picked out of a wound one day while dressing it. I picked other bits out from the same man, but they were too small to keep. He was simply speckled all over his back and one arm with shell wounds. The Mauser bullets are most merciful, only making an opening about the size of the head of a bonnet pin. Maritzburg is about as big as Parramatta.'

Trooper Edgar Palmer who rode with the Natal Carbineers on the day of the relief, wrote to his mother in Victoria from Highlands Camp, Natal:

My Dearest Mother,

Of course by now you've got over the excitement of the Ladysmith Relief, and everything relating thereto must be old news; but still I know you'll be glad to hear the part the Carbineers took therein.

You've all heard that we and the Imperial Light Horse were the first in. On the Wednesday morning we crossed the Tugela and pushed right forward, passing our gallant infantry, who'd been so successful the previous day. We scouted right out in open ground, scattering small parties of Boers, capturing a few here and there, and three with tents standing. They must have scooted in a terrible hurry as everything to private letters and photos were left behind. We captured a great quantity of small arms and big gun ammunition, and then pushed on to a line of kopjes about one mile and a half in front of our fighting line, and about four and a half miles from Ladysmith, by which we were separated by a very high long hill in front.

We worried scattered parties of the enemy from the kopjes and got them well on the run. In the afternoon we went forward to thoroughly clear the country before a general advance was ordered. It was tricky, but we had little opposition and went steadily on till we reached the top of the hill on our front. We knew we were getting near Ladysmith, and all necks were craned for our first view. I was about 100 yards in front of our advanced scouting, and cautiously creeping to a

ridge, expecting to find foes there; right down in the hollow about three miles away was our looked for goal, looking most peaceful and calm, the last place in the world one would think to be the scene of a bloody siege of four months.

I'm rather proud of the fact of being the first of the relieving force to see Ladysmith, and I couldn't help being selfish and enjoying the feeling alone for some minutes before calling our crowd up.

The excitement was then intense and we stood on the skyline, regardless of Boers or anything else, and let off cheer after cheer. An order then came to retire, to our intense disgust, and as it was then nearly sundown we gave up the idea of getting into Ladysmith that night.

Just then came up our Major Mackenzie and Major Gough. I must say that previous to this we heard that Dundonald had expressly ordered us not to go further forward than the top of the hill on which we were, as the other part of the cavalry division had been driven back from Mount Bulwana, so what ensued shows what daredevils our officers were.

Major Gough: "Are we going through to Ladysmith tonight Mackenzie?"

Major Mackenzie: "Can we get through?"

Major Gough: "Can we get through?"

Major Mackenzie: "By God we can."

Major Gough: "Then let us go."

That was enough. We waited for no orders, but gave one yell; downhill we went pell mell. There was no path down and the whole hillside was a mass of big boulders, but we managed to get to the bottom without anyone breaking his neck.

I managed to get a front seat and off we went at a rising pace across spruits to see who could get in first. We expected a volley any minute, but I don't think anything could have stopped us then. We were simply mad for the time being. As we got near Wagon Hill we began to be anxious lest we should be mistaken for the enemy, so we shouted and cheered the louder to warn them, and then as we swept round the base all doubt was ended by a rousing cheer from the top; and the guns burst out a triumphant defiance over our heads, towards Mount Bulwana where the Boers were trying to shift their big guns. Then we dashed through our outposts (Carbineers as it happened that day) and we knew our object was attained.

Meantime our officers, by dint of hard swearing, had got us in hand a bit, and we pulled up waiting for stragglers. By the time we got up and had formed into some kind of order the townspeople and garrison were coming to meet us, and we met just outside the town.

I shan't attempt to describe the meeting or the reception we got, and you have read all that in the papers. Illness had laid a heavy hand on them, their ghostly faces and shrunken frames seemed terrible to us healthy chaps. We and the Imperial Light Horse rode in two abreast. Sir George White and his staff met us in the main street and made a most feeling speech, which however could only be heard in intervals of cheering. I see the papers say it was a compliment of Buller's to Natal in letting the Carbineers in first, but he had nothing to do with

it, neither had Lord Dundonald whom everybody is praising for getting in first. With fondest and best love to you dearest Mother, and all and everyone at home.

Ever your affectionate boy,
Edgar.

Mr Walter Pepworth, a member of the Natal Parliament, returned to his farm outside Ladysmith after the end of the Boer occupation. He found the place wrecked with 27 graves in the garden and the tennis court. Mr Pepworth said: 'Riding through to Ladysmith via Pieter's Station the stench is terrible, and although nearly smothering myself with my handkerchief, I was almost poisoned with the stench of dead horses, while flies by the millions almost drove me mad. The fight at Pieter's Hill must have been fearful. Trees are riddled with shot and shell, while deep holes in the ground, and masses of rock smashed up, show the disastrous effects of lyddite. Thousands of unused Mauser cartridges are scattered about the veldt, also tons of pieces of shell. Remains of Boer camps are to be seen, and every ridge is fortified. In one Boer trench the earth has been thrown over dead Boers. Part of a body protruded through one heap, whilst a foot was sticking out of another.'

Trooper Marshall, the lad from Gundagai, giving his experiences in the final stages of the relief of Ladysmith, said: 'In one of my brief notes I stated that I had transferred from Bethune's Mounted Infantry to the Maxim Detachment. At the present time we have six Maxims allotted to the Corps.

'I had a spell at Maritzburg from a slight wound, a splinter from a Boer shell struck me in the back. It was not serious. I stayed 10 days at Maritzburg, returning to Spearman's Camp the day previous to making the attack on Vaal Krantz. There we encountered a Spion Kop for a second time. After three days fighting we had to fall back on Chieveley. In belonging to the Maxims you have the distinction of always being in the thick of the fighting, and some very tight corners we have been in. You take up a position on a kopje and have to hold it and cover the advance or retirement of the infantry. In the fourth and successful attempt to relieve Ladysmith we were in the extreme front the whole time.

'Round about Monte Cristo we did grand work for which we received the commendation of "the only Buller", and the thanks of our gallant commander Lord Dundonald. At Monte Cristo the Maxims had been without rations for two days, and we were relieved to enter the Boer laager full of provisions. We had an excellent meal off a bullock the Boers had killed in the morning for their own consumption.

'After four months of rough campaigning and hard fighting, it was with a feeling of relief that we entered Ladysmith. I am proud, and will be for

the rest of my life, of the important part our Maxim Corps played during the progress of the war. Since the relief of Ladysmith we had an issue of clothing for the winter. Our guns are known as the Colt Automatic, and Lord Dundonald's galloping guns. The gun is the American Maxim firing 400 shots per minute and mounted on Dundonald's galloping carriage. They are beautiful little machines, and the equal if not superior to the English Maxims.'

CHAPTER 10

Australians at Bloemfontein and the advance to Johannesburg

Along the 500 mile front from Ladysmith through Bloemfontein to Kimberley the army now rested, poised ready for the advance. From Bloemfontein the British had every incentive to move north before the scattered commandos could recover. The first concern of Roberts in an enemy country was to ensure his communication lines over the long railways to the southern ports. Both Port Elizabeth and East London were over 400 miles back and the main supply base at Cape Town 750 miles distant.

On the Orange River burghers retreating in haste as the army moved up behind them blew up the bridges at Norval's Pont and Bethulie, leaving only the stone road bridge at Bethulie intact. The piers of the bridge were mined but the charges failed. Across the river at Springfontein the railways converged so that between there and Bloemfontein everything had to pass over the one single track.

When the army arrived in Bloemfontein not more than five days bread and biscuit was in hand for each man. Although the ration was augmented to some degree by food from the town, the arrival of reinforcements over the next few weeks made supply a top priority. In addition to the forwarding of troops and food, the massing of miscellaneous supplies included such things as winter clothing and medical necessities.

Lord Roberts later said: 'It was sixteen days after we got to Bloemfontein before the first railway truck came in. We had to do the best we could with what we had with us and what we could get from the neighbourhood.' On 21 May 1900 he reported in despatches from Kroonstad: 'From the country itself we were able to get scarcely anything in the shape of food except meat, and every mile advanced took us further away from the only place where a sufficiency of supplies was obtainable.'¹

Roberts also had to contend with an epidemic of enteric fever, a legacy from drinking the river water polluted from Cronje's laager during the halt at Paardeberg. Within a period of ten days thousands of men entered hospital. Every available building in the capital was hastily requisitioned for the housing of the sick. 'Banjo' Paterson wrote: 'The men are dying like flies from enteric fever; the streets are seldom free from funeral processions for which the fatigue parties can hardly dig the graves fast enough.'

Major W. T. Bridges had advanced to Karee Siding, a short distance north of Bloemfontein, when he developed fever. Bridges was invalided to England from the hospital at Bloemfontein before returning to Australia.

When the New South Wales Lancers arrived in Cape Town from England some of them returned home rather than disembark with the regiment for various good reasons. In some quarters in Sydney their courage had been under question but almost every man returned to Cape Town as soon as his private commitments permitted. A New South Wales Lancer from Parramatta, Corporal Harkus, lost no time in sailing with the second Lancer Contingent. He rejoined the regiment immediately after the surrender at Paardeberg and saw action at Poplar Grove and Driefontein. He was a prominent horseman and rifle shot in the Lancers. In England with the Lancers at the time of Queen Victoria's Jubilee, in 1897, he won a gold medal at a military tournament. Corporal Harkus died of enteric fever in the New South Wales hospital at Bloemfontein.

Mr Horace Spooner, correspondent for the Sydney newspaper the *Evening News*, known to his friends as 'Jack', also died at Bloemfontein. Soon after recovering in hospital from fever he rode some miles north to a railway siding called Glen, not far from the Modder River, where the New South Wales Mounted Rifles and the Australian Horse suffered casualties from the Boer artillery. On the way back Spooner was forced to spend the night on the open veldt when the wagon column he travelled with lost direction. After that he suffered a relapse, the result of sleeping in the open.

In the action at Glen Siding on 29 March 1900 the Australian Horse was sent to draw the fire and so locate the enemy guns on the kopjes. Trooper W. T. Bonner was killed by a bursting shell. His brother John was the first

man up to drag his body from beneath his horse. Bonner was buried close to a shady bush in the camp and his mates erected a small wooden cross.

In the country south-east and south-west of Bloemfontein many burghers on commando returned to the farms. Troop detachments marched to the small towns where the burghers handed in their rifles and gave the oath of neutrality. Near Reddersburg, south-east of Bloemfontein, a battalion sent by General Gatacre to show the flag in outlying towns was attacked on the open veldt by General de Wet with a reorganised commando. The column marched light in supplies and without artillery. Retiring to a kopje the soldiers fought while ammunition and water lasted. Then tormented by thirst and with ammunition expended hundreds of men surrendered and were marched towards Pretoria about an hour before the arrival of a relief force. With the Stormberg disaster still fresh in mind the Commander-in-Chief recalled Major-General Gatacre to Bloemfontein and dismissed him by ordering his return to England.

At Wepener, a small town on the Basuto border, a commando attack against 1,600 South African colonials ended in failure. Outnumbered and outgunned from an entrenched position 3 miles beyond the town, the colonials held out for 16 days until the burghers retired.

A young Victorian named A. J. Grey took a passage to Cape Town soon after the outbreak of the war. He joined Brabant's Border Horse, a Cape colonial force with many young Australians in the ranks. The regiment was marching to the relief of Wepener when Grey and two other Australians went forward to reconnoitre Bushman's Kopje. As the scouts neared the top of the kopje, they saw a Boer 600 yards away. The man fired his rifle and the three made off in the direction of their horses under fire from several hundred burghers. One of the scouts went down with a bullet through his lungs. When Grey went to his assistance a bullet snicked the badge off the side of his hat. Another scoured through the crown of his head leaving a deep groove. The shock stunned Grey and left him temporarily dazed and blinded. In his own words he 'could hear the Melbourne tram bells ringing'.

As soon as he recovered a little Grey managed to pull himself up by resting the butt of his rifle on the ground. Seeing this the enemy opened fire again and shattered the breech of his rifle. The bullet glanced off and hit him on the inside of the knee, making a bad wound. As Grey dropped down behind the rocks on the kopje his left leg rested exposed, with the result that four more bullets found a mark in that one leg from just below the knee and the groin. Grey said he could hear the bullets striking the leg 'like little stones thrown into soft mud'.

The two wounded men lay down behind the rocks until dark while the other scout went for help. Grey could only move by lying on his back and

¹ Roberts' Report to the Secretary of State from Kroonstad, 21 May 1900.

pulling himself along backwards. His mate was weak from the loss of blood and could only walk a few steps at a time. Presently the two became separated in the dark. Grey crawled a mile and a half in six hours. He kept on drawing himself backwards suffering increasingly from thirst and from the wounds opening up. Fortunately he reached a spruit and gained some relief. He was crossing a mealie field when he heard voices. Grey realised these were the voices of Australians making their way to the Boer lines to look for the wounded scouts. He called frantically but got no reply, until he managed to give a 'Coo-ee', the call of the Australian bush. Grey was taken six miles on horseback, and suffered a painful day journey in a bullock wagon to a field hospital. Eventually he returned to Melbourne on a walking stick, with four bullets still in his leg.

De Wet's greatest success at this time occurred at Sannah's Post near the Modder River, 20 miles east of Bloemfontein. From Bloemfontein the British right flank extended 41 miles to Thaba 'Nchu, a small town garrisoned by a force commanded by Brigadier-General Broadwood. On 30 March Broadwood informed Roberts in Bloemfontein of his intention to withdraw under threat of a superior force. At 2 p.m. on the same day the convoy of stores and families of loyal citizens from the district commenced the withdrawal to Bloemfontein accompanied by a force of 1,800 men and two batteries of Royal Horse Artillery.

That night the head of the convoy camped at the Modder River, 17 miles from Thaba 'Nchu near the waterworks on which Bloemfontein depended for most of its water supply. The officer in command at the waterworks had earlier been warned by Broadwood at Thaba 'Nchu of the need for precautions in the event of the enemy advancing from the north. Having reached the west bank of the Modder and believing that effective patrolling had been carried out, Broadwood no doubt felt secure. By 4.30 a.m. on 31 March the entire convoy had crossed the Modder. At 6 a.m. when the wagons and Cape carts were spreading out and heading west over the two miles of open country to the drift at Koorn Spruit, shells from the north-east began to fall on the camp at the Modder.

Broadwood thought he was being attacked by the commando whose presence near Thaba 'Nchu had been such a threat to his position. But the force at his rear under Piet de Wet had arrived from the north. De Wet had 1,200 burghers and he positioned guns on high ground so as to command the area between the Modder and Koorn Spruit. The British column hastened on towards Koorn Spruit where the bed of the drift dipped to 15 feet below the veldt. At the drift the leading wagons were surprised by parties of Boers who, emerging from the cover of long reeds in the marshy bed of the spruit, disarmed the wagon crews as they jolted down the sloping banks.

The interruption to the movement of the convoy at the drift caused the wagons to jam up in front and a gun team from 'U' Battery got stuck in the mud in the drift. There were no rifle shots so the cause of the congestion was not known to the British. When Roberts' Horse was sent forward to investigate they soon found themselves riding into a hail of bullets at 400 yards range.

The great ambush in which the British found themselves enmeshed from the front and the rear was well planned and executed by General de Wet. The Boer leader had waited patiently in the bed of the spruit and in farm buildings near the western bank with 400 burghers, who captured the head of the convoy without firing a single shot.

'Q' Battery coming up on the left of the convoy was only 300 yards from the drift when it wheeled round with Roberts' Horse for 1,200 yards, veering south towards an embankment and buildings for a new railway which were under construction. Near the site prepared for the new Sannah's Post railway station the guns were unlimbered and commenced shelling the spruit. Both the teams of the battery and Roberts' Horse lost heavily in the dash away from the spruit. Severe rifle fire from the direction of the spruit repeatedly shot down the gun teams and volunteers were called for from Roberts' Horse. Four of the guns reached the shelter of the embankment. One gun was left where it overturned in the dash from the spruit. Another was abandoned in front of the embankment when several horse teams were shot down trying to get it away. Only two officers and ten men of the battery were unwounded.

Lieutenant J. C. Walch, a Tasmanian artillery officer on Special Service, took part in the action with 'Q' Battery at Sannah's Post on 31 March 1900. Walch was severely wounded on the right arm. In recognition of the outstanding gallantry shown by all the officers and men of 'Q' Battery, Royal Horse Artillery on that day, Victoria Crosses were awarded to two officers and two men.

Rimington's Scouts found a drift over the spruit a mile to the south, and the guns and mounted infantry retired safely. Boers from the spruit where the ambush took place and from the Modder came in pursuit, following the New Zealand rearguard all the way to the drift.

Soon after 11 o'clock Broadwood had successfully extricated two-thirds of his force from Koorn Spruit to the safety of favourable ground away to the north from the scene of the ambush. By 1.30 p.m. Piet de Wet had retired beyond the Modder taking with him 421 prisoners, 7 guns and 93 wagons loaded with stores. The British losses were 159 killed and wounded. The waterworks was retaken by General Ian Hamilton on 23 April.

Early on the morning of 31 March a mounted column arrived at Boesman's Kop, 5 miles west of Koorn Spruit. The commander, Lieut-Colonel C. G. Martyr, divided his force by sending one column towards Koorn

Spruit and another column of Mounted Infantry and Queensland Mounted Infantry, under Lieut-Colonel St G. C. Henry, to the Modder River. The column secured Waterval Drift north of the waterworks, with the objective of advancing south along the eastern bank of the river.

The mounted infantry crossed the drift and gained a footing on the eastern bank. In the early afternoon increased rifle fire and shelling forced Colonel Henry to recall the troops back across the river.

Trooper Ben Strange, a West Australian in Roberts' Horse, wrote describing the attack at Koorn Spruit: 'We had to retire from Thaba 'Nchu and retreated during the whole of one night. De Wet who had laid his plans was aided by a lack of scouting. At 4 a.m. we lay in the open and slept for an hour, and moved on again after breakfast. We proceeded in charge of the convoy into Koorn Spruit, and just as the Kaffir drivers had got the wagons into the creek the Boers came from cover. The wagons stuck in the thick mud. It was in attempting to recover some of the guns under the noses of the Boers that several gunners of "Q" Battery got the Victoria Cross.'

David Plant, a Victorian volunteer who failed to get to the war with the first Victorian contingent, paid his passage to South Africa and enlisted in Roberts' Horse. He left an account of his experiences on 31 March: 'There were about 300 of Roberts' Horse and some of the 10th Hussars, Household Cavalry, Northumberland Fusiliers, New Zealanders and the Life Guards, about 1,200 in all. At daybreak on the Saturday the Boers started to shell us, so we got the order to saddle up, while some of the lads fired on them with their rifles, then we made a start for Bloemfontein, retiring at a slow pace.

'Some of the men were eating breakfast consisting of a piece of bread as they rode, some were filling their pipes and others yarning. Our transport was up in front. A heavy shell fire continued behind us, when all of a sudden we saw the wagons forming into a laager, so we thought the Boers must be in front of us. Then some hundreds of Boers became visible in a deep donga not many yards ahead of us, with rifles in their hands, and some 50 yards behind them were two Maxim guns.

'Our commander gave the word to "right about face" and gallop every man for himself. While he was giving the command, the Boers opened the hottest fire on us that we had experienced. It was a regular hailstorm of bullets. I had gone about 300 yards when I saw a poor fellow on foot running, so I gave him my horse, but soon got another for there were plenty of riderless horses there. I only got about 50 yards, however, when my horse fell dead. I looked around for another, but could not see one, so I lay down behind my dead horse determined to bag as many Boers as I could.

'I had about 80 rounds and made up my mind not to waste a shot, but had only fired three shots when I saw a splendid horse galloping my way, and ran for him as fast as I could. By good luck I caught him, jumped on and rode for my life. I reached my squadron and found they had formed up again. We peppered away at the enemy, against whom we could only just hold our own, but we did it.

'We lost about 100 men killed and wounded out of our 300, and I came out of it without a scratch. It is surprising the kindness that is shown on the battlefield to the wounded, and you will see men go back amongst the shot and shell by the dozen to help the wounded, and often get killed themselves trying to save others.'

Trooper Ben Spurway, Queensland Mounted Infantry, wrote to his mother from Waterval prison camp some miles north of Pretoria giving his account of the action at Waterval Drift. Without guns and in danger of being cut off the detachment of 200 mounted infantry was recalled. A rearguard was ordered to cover the retirement by holding the drift. Spurway wrote: 'It looked like certain death, as the Boers were nearly all around the drift. As I passed some of the chaps said "Goodbye old chap". When we got to the drift, the Captain sent another man to tell us to hold the drift at any cost. We dismounted and got the best cover we could, and started potting at the Boers, all the time anxiously listening for the sounds of the company's rifles covering our retreat, that was to be the signal for us to scoot. But not a sound came, and we knew that they had plenty of time to cross the drift.

'At last the Sergeant-Major looked around and saw the whole company riding for their lives across the skyline, it having been found impractical to relieve us. He turned and said: "Men they have deserted us, every man mount and get away the best way he can, and God be with you."

'There were then about 150 Boers only 300 yards away. When we mounted there were 400 Boers all firing at us at a distance of not more than 400 yards. One gun was firing shrapnel, and there was one Vickers Maxim and about 50 Boers lying in wait 50 yards away. The air was whipped with bullets. We had about 400 yards to ride. Before us was a creek. Once across we were right. We were making for there as hard as we could go, jumping over wide deep water courses. Our horses seemed to have wings, poor brutes. It was not their fault we were captured.

'I passed one poor chap, and as I passed he got a bullet through his head. He fell from his saddle a dead man. His horse passed me covered in blood. The chap's name was Herbert Reece, a Rockhampton man. Well, the rest of us got to the creek without a scratch.

'Into the creek and down we went up to the saddle flaps in a quagmire. All except myself. My horse got his two feet in and swung round out of it.

I turned and went up the bank again, resolved to have another try lower down. Just as I got on the bank, a bullet struck my horse in the belly, and he reared right over me and fell into the creek, nearly burying me in the mud. I managed with some assistance to find a place to cross, and ran into half a dozen Boers who had us covered. They told us to throw down our arms. What could we do but obey? We were not going to be shot like dogs. Besides, we were fagged out, running with about 50 pounds of mud stuck to us. They captured five of us including the Sergeant-Major.

'Two chaps flung away their arms and went a different way. I don't know what became of them. Just as we were taken, a Maxim of ours came into action, and the last bit of wind we had was expended getting out of the way of that thing. It was an awful day. For six hours you could hear nothing but bullets whizzing round.

'But that ride through the jaws of death as I call it, was wonderful.'

Bloemfontein normally had a white population of about 6,000 but it had now become a great canvas city. The town had been cut off from supplies for some months when the soldiers first entered and very few tents were available, many of the troops being without cover for several days.

During the early weeks medical arrangements were stretched to the utmost. No provision had been made for the large number of casualties nor for the incidence of disease. There was also a shortage of nourishing food and trained nurses to look after the sick. With the opening up of the railway from the south tens of thousands of troops and tons of supplies poured in over the single railway track that had become a lifeline.

In addition to the well-equipped town hospital, every available public building, school, college or convent and even Parliament House became centres for the care of the sick and wounded. The New South Wales flag floated from the Orange Free State Military Barracks when it was taken over by the New South Wales Army Medical Corps and turned into a hospital. The building was in bad repair but with the help of the Royal Engineers a lot of improvements were made. Additional doors and windows were built in. Accommodation provided for 150 beds all of which were rapidly filled, mainly with enteric cases. At first the men were brought in and laid on the floor in their battle-stained uniforms with nothing more than a single blanket. There were no beds or bedding or sleeping clothes. The men were packed close on the floor with only just enough room for passing. Special foods for the sick were not available, except for tinned milk and Bovril.

A New South Wales Nursing Sister, Annie Matchett, wrote: 'We are really at the front at last. We were telegraphed for, to come and work at the Australian Hospital which the NSW Army Medical Corps had opened in the Free State Military Barracks. I must tell you under what difficulties

we labour here. Firstly, there is no gas or electric light in Bloemfontein. Candles are very scarce; wood and coal are scarce also. It is most difficult to get hot water at night. We all have spirit lamps, but no methylated spirit is to be had in town. All the shops are empty. There are a great many deaths here. We counted 20 funerals in one day. They have no coffins, the dead are merely stitched up in grey blankets and carried to the cemetery on stretchers, with the Union Jack thrown over. For an officer's funeral they have a gun carriage. All day long a fatigue party is kept working in the cemetery.'

The New South Wales Army Medical Corps had a record of service and efficiency unsurpassed by any similar Corps in the field in South Africa. The Corps left Sydney in 1899 with six wagons and complete field equipment, including their own horses. Led by Colonel W. D. C. Williams, the principal Medical Officer in charge with Major T. H. Fiaschi next in command, the total complement consisted of seven officers and 85 men.

At first the Corps could not get away from Cape Town to the front. An Australian newspaper quoted Colonel Williams as appealing to the military authorities in Cape Town in the following terms: 'If you have no use for field hospitals up at the front, perhaps you would not mind turning us into a Battery. All we want are guns, we can horse well enough, and all my boys are just as handy at battery drill as they are at first-aid.'

The Corps joined the Kimberley Relief Force, and was present at the action at Sunnyside Kopjes with the Queenslanders and Canadians on New Year's Day 1900. Two wagons under Captain C. A. Edwards went with French to Kimberley. In the absence of Colonel Williams who was in Cape Town, Major Fiaschi took charge of the other four wagons at Paardeberg. From Paardeberg they kept up with the action all the way to Bloemfontein. The Corps went out and brought in the wounded from Sannah's Post. At Bloemfontein Colonel Williams became the principal Medical Officer to the Australian and New Zealand Forces. A London war correspondent wrote in praise of the amount of work done by Colonel Williams during the advance from Bloemfontein to Pretoria: 'He commandeered a light Cape Cart with four ponies, in which he was able to drive 40 miles a day. He is the first man I have met who seems to be a master of Army medical work in the field.'²

In his despatches to the War Office on 31 March 1900, Lord Roberts named Major Fiaschi as 'deserving special mention on account of the assistance which he rendered to the sick and wounded, as well as upon the efficient condition in which he has kept the ambulance under his command, the services of which since its arrival have been so valuable'. Major Fiaschi was awarded the Distinguished Service Order.

² The correspondent of the London *Daily Mail*, Julian Ralph, in his book, *Towards Pretoria* (1900).

On 4 April the Commander-in-Chief made an official visit to the New South Wales Hospital at the Artillery Barracks. He gave high praise to the New South Wales Ambulance wagons saying that he intended to recommend them as a pattern for the Imperial Army. In 1885 Lord Wolseley, the British Commander-in-Chief in Egypt, had paid a similar compliment in praising the pattern of the five wagons that arrived in the Sudan with the Ambulance Corps sent from New South Wales. The ambulance wagons had been fully fitted up in Sydney.

When Colonel Williams returned to Sydney from South Africa he said: 'Whatever virtue is claimed for our Corps is due to the Wagon Service. The treatment of the wounded and the field equipment, and the arrangement of the Corps is otherwise identical with those of the Imperial Army, and in my opinion could not be bettered. Our wagons are much higher than those in the Imperial Corps, and they are consequently far more mobile. The country we went through is as rough as you could find. There was not one of my wagons seriously knocked about. The whole lot could be put in the same order as when they left Sydney for about £120. That is one of the factors in the success of the NSW Corps.

'Another is that instead of depending on the Army Service Corps for drivers and horses, we provide our own. This relieves us of depending on other people; it's an old maxim, "if you want anything done well, do it yourself". I first noticed the drawbacks in the Imperial system when I went to the Sudan with the Sydney Contingent in 1885. I saw that the wagons were too heavy, and that difficulties were encountered when depending upon the Army Service Corps; so when the NSW Corps was formed later on, I introduced what I considered to be improvements. The wagons were constructed of light tough wood and steel from my own design, and if they will stand being galloped all over South Africa, they will stand anything.'

The Australian and New Zealand troops were reinforced by the arrival of the Second Contingents. These contingents were all mounted and were scattered within a radius of 8 miles around the Free State capital. At the end of April two members of the New South Wales Parliament, Mr R. Sleath and Mr B. B. O'Connor, arrived in Bloemfontein and were given an interview by Lord Roberts. Roberts told them that the high opinion held for the Australians was shown by the forward and responsible positions they held in the course of the campaign. 'The best proof of what I think of them is the position I have assigned to them. At first the men were only tried out of compliment to the Colonies, but now we can't do without them,' Lord Roberts said.

³ Colonel Williams in the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

Saddler-Sergeant Satchwell, First Victorian Mounted Rifles, described how the reputation of the colonials as horsemen was put to the test by Lord Roberts: 'It was the "C-in-C" in South Africa who put our horsemanship to a severe test later on at Bloemfontein. From what we were asked to do he evidently thought most of us had spent our lives in riding up and down mountains. In response to his commands away we went, galloping over country of the roughest description, up and down kopjes at breakneck speed leaping rocks and riding where, on other occasions, we would have lead our horses and walked. Our manoeuvres which I expected would at any moment be attended with disaster to some of us, were watched closely by thousands of the Imperial soldiers, and it was gratifying to know that we gained the admiration of them and their brilliant Commander-in-Chief.'

About this time Roberts formed the opinion that the southern part of the Free State seemed to be settling down. For weeks soldiers in the countryside called at farms where the burghers, having left the commandos, now declared themselves farmers again. These were the men who, upon surrendering their arms, gave an undertaking on oath to abstain from taking part in further hostilities and received in return a pass.

'Banjo' Paterson on the other hand reported that the war was being run too much like a cricket match with too much deference and courtesy being shown in the Free State. 'They are supposed to have laid down their arms,' he said, 'but as a matter of fact, they handed in their old worn-out muzzle-loading rifles with which their grandfathers shot lions and zebra on the plains where they are now breeding from imported merino sheep and English stud horses. These old weapons they solemnly deposited and went back to the laager again, with brand new Mausers in their hands.

"Back to the laager again,
Back to the laager again,
It was only in fun that I gave up my gun,
I'm back to the laager again."

'One can imagine some festive burgher humming some such parody as he gaily rides back to the fighting line after giving up his weapons. What the authorities will have to do, will be to give notice that all stock will be confiscated on farms where the owner is away from home.'

Lance-Corporal Edward Collins, Second New South Wales Mounted Rifles, put his point of view: 'If I had my way, none of them would be allowed to return to their farms, but sent to the rear until after the war.'

Trooper Ben Strange had this to say: 'Deceptive indeed is the old Boer on his farm. A squadron rides up and he innocently hands over his firearms. You would not imagine the old "hayseed" had ever been with a commando

⁴ A. E. Satchwell, *On Active Service* (1901).

as he potters around. But as you ride away along the spruit and across the veldt—ping—comes a bullet from away among the rocks. You instinctively know that the man who is potting at you is the quiet looking old farmer whose second rifle you didn't secure.'

At a farm near Karee, a railway siding north of Bloemfontein, the enemy surprised and fired on a New South Wales Mounted Rifles patrol. Private A. H. Du Frayer turned back to pick up a mate whose horse was shot. For this action he was awarded one of the four scarves knitted by Queen Victoria for presentation to a colonial soldier from each of the Empire countries—Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa—who had distinguished himself in the field. Lord Roberts stated that 'the selection for these gifts of honour was made by the officers commanding the contingents concerned, it being understood that gallant conduct in the field was to be the primary consideration'.

The regimental citation describing Private Du Frayer's action read: 'In April last when the regiment was on outpost duty near Karee, a reconnoitring patrol was sent out in the early morning. When approaching a farmhouse flying the white flag every precaution was taken, but seeing no one about the men, numbering about 12, rode within the stone fence enclosure when they were immediately fired upon from within the house and also by a party of Boers concealed in a donga on the veldt.

'The gateway was narrow but all succeeded in getting away safely except Private Clark of "B" Squadron whose horse was shot and, in falling, stunned his rider. Du Frayer noticed the predicament and, turning back, galloped to Clark's rescue. The gateway was only about 150 yards from the farmhouse, but Du Frayer dismounted, shook Clark into a semi-conscious state, and mounted again, got Clark up behind him, and finally out of danger. Private Du Frayer was exposed to a heavy fire from both quarters previously mentioned.'

Meanwhile camp life near Bloemfontein had become most uncomfortable in the steady rain. Paterson reported: 'The camps are quagmires and the tents let in the damp till one's clothes are always clammy, and there is no comfort anywhere. The Victorians have been encamped on the foot of a big kopje to the north of the town, and the soil would be excellent for potato growing, being black, moist and tenacious; but it is a dismal place to camp men and horses on. Men's tempers get very brittle in the monotony of camp life, and everyone will be glad when the saddles are once more in acquisition.'

By the end of April with all southern strategic points held Roberts felt that the railway was secure. Sufficient supplies were held in Bloemfontein, remounts had arrived, wagons repaired, and teams of mules and oxen collected. All divisions of the army were reinforced and rested. The newly arrived troops included a large force of volunteers from England—the

Imperial Yeomanry. Guns and ammunition were massed ready for the advance.

At the beginning of May the army in South Africa consisted of Buller's Natal Force, the army under Methuen in the west and Roberts and Hamilton in the centre; a total of 100,000 men. They were opposed by no more than 30,000 Boers in the field, excluding those who were taking leave on the farms. Another 70,000 British soldiers held stationary strategic positions guarding the railways, the bridges and culverts—in all about 170,000 men. About half of the total Boer forces was ready to oppose the march of Roberts and Hamilton to Pretoria.

The fighting force directly under the command of Lord Roberts amounted to 24,000 men and 210 guns. On the morning of 3 May the advance north of the Vaal River commenced, following the line of the railway. At the same time General Hamilton, moving on a parallel course east of the railway, began his march to the Vaal from Thaba 'Nchu with 14,000 men and 48 guns. To confront these armies the Boers mustered not more than 15,000 burghers under General Botha who had become Commandant-General of the Boer Forces after the death of General Joubert at the end of March.

Roberts accepted the widely held belief that the fall of Pretoria would herald the end of the Boer resistance. Strategically the capital was important because of the necessity to seize the railway at Delagoa Bay, the one sea link open to the Republics from which they could draw military supplies and maintain overseas contacts.

For the great advance Roberts' and Hamilton's forces included all the Australian contingents, numbering just over 3,000 mounted troopers. Right through to Pretoria they formed part of the spearhead of the army, riding ahead in reconnaissance or scouting along the flanks.

On the morning of 30 April 1900 Hamilton left Thaba 'Nchu advancing with his mounted infantry towards Jacobsrust on what was actually the beginning of the long march to Pretoria. Crossing Koranna Spruit at the end of 7 miles the column halted before strong rifle and gun fire. The Boers were massing along ridges crossing the line of march. The ridges were traversed by a road leading to the east of Houtnek. A second road passed almost under the shadow of Thoba Mountain at the western end of the ridges, and beyond through Houtnek Pass.

Hamilton felt that the best chance of success lay in attacking near Thoba Mountain. Two batteries and a detachment of De Lisle's Mounted Infantry engaged the enemy from kopjes opposite the pass at Houtnek. The infantry cleared the lower slopes of the mountain approaches but were unable to force the pass that day. At night the troops retained their ground while Hamilton telegraphed French at Thaba 'Nchu for support. Overnight the burghers returned to the laagers behind the pass. When morning came they

rode off hurriedly at the sight of cavalry squadrons advancing around the mountain from the west. By mid-afternoon the whole of the British column was camped at Jacobsrust, just beyond the pass. In the two days 43 casualties had been incurred. The enemy retreated so quickly that the ambulances were forced to leave the wounded. Surgeon-Major G. F. McWilliams, a Western Australian Medical Officer, reported: 'In one little group there were five men of different nationalities much mutilated by shell. They were a Frenchman, a German, an Irishman, one American and a Boer.'

The battle at Houtnek was preceded by a successful reconnaissance of the laager and enemy positions by Lieutenant F. A. Dove and 25 men of 'E' Squadron, New South Wales Mounted Rifles. The only infantry squadron recruited in New South Wales, the men had served as such based at Enslin guarding the line of communications with the Kimberley Relief Force from 9 December. At Naauwpoort on 1 February the conversion to mounted rifles took place. Operations as mounted troopers began two days later following an inspection by General French.

On the morning of the general advance on Houtnek a detachment led by Lieutenant Dove held an advanced post on a kopje all day in the face of heavy shrapnel and rifle fire. At night the men retired to a farmhouse and returned to the kopje before dawn. Well within enemy range, they stayed until the order to withdraw came at midday.

The Australians retired at a gallop extending widely in groups of four to a kopje three-quarters of a mile in the rear. In this manoeuvre Trooper F. V. Smith was killed and three others wounded. Saddler-Sergeant S. A. Palazzi described his experience: 'We proceeded in the direction of Thaba 'Nchu which is 25 miles east from the Orange River Colony capital (Bloemfontein) and reached there after two days battling; the whole of General Ian Hamilton's column being in by the third day. Two days afterwards the column went in the direction of Winburg.'

'The first two days we were engaged in the battle of Houtnek where our duty was to hold a kopje right near one of the enemy's gun positions. We were firing at their big gun 1,500 yards away, and at the pom-poms which were closer still. It was warm work. If any of our men dared to rise or exchange their position to ease cramped muscles, they would be saluted with a heavy shower of bullets and the big guns would rake the hill with shrapnel, while the rattle of pom-poms was in one's ears all day.'

'So well did our men avail themselves of cover that during the whole of the first day there was not a casualty but when we were retiring on the second day poor Smith, of Chatwsood, was shot while his horse was at full gallop and, between the fall and the wound, a comrade was gone. During this time we were too far advanced for the authorities to send us provisions, and I leave it to you to imagine how hungry we were, considering some had only one biscuit.'

The biscuits that were part of the army rations were large and square and so hard that normally they required soaking.

In a well-tended Memorial Garden in the Sydney suburb of Chatswood there is a white marble monument bearing the name, among others, of Trooper F. V. Smith. He was 18 years of age.

Trooper Vincent Davis also left his account of the action: 'We had rather a severe fight at Houtnek, the place where young Fred Smith of our company was killed. I was forced to take cover in a creek, and emerged wet to the skin in a pretty plight, but got safely back to camp where I was "snap-shotted". Young Smith was coming on with the rest when he was seen to throw up his hands and fall from his horse, breaking his neck in the fall. On examination afterwards he was found to have been shot through the body.'

At 5 a.m. on 3 May Roberts left by train for Karee siding, 20 miles from Bloemfontein, an advanced base previously gained by driving the Boers from the ridges held to the south-east of the railway. The objective of the first day's march was reached without strong opposition from De la Rey, whose commando had waited in Brandfort for the past two months. Roberts entered Brandfort in the early afternoon. The New Zealanders held the village but the spearhead of the columns were already pursuing the commandos northwards.

Trooper Harold Reed, 'B' Squadron, First Queensland Mounted Infantry, wrote from Brandfort on 3 May: 'It is surprising to see the Boers carrying their dead away. They have a net of some kind and two men on horseback haul it between them with the dead in it.'

Lieutenant H. J. I. Harris, Second Queensland Mounted Infantry, recorded the day's march: 'We left Karee Siding at daybreak on the 3rd, and had the scouting to do for the division on the left flank. At half-past two we entered the town of Brandfort. We camped at the town water supply to prevent it being interfered with. The place is rather pretty having a few decent stores and a Town Hall, which has a clock something like the South Melbourne one.'

Roberts stayed in Brandfort with the infantry while the railway was placed in order for the movement of supplies. At the same time the mounted units under General Hutton on the west of the railway and General Ian Hamilton on the eastern flank moved to the Vet River, where the Boers prepared to resist.

At the river De la Rey disposed his forces widely. The British declined a straight-out frontal attack and began by crossing a little-used and undefended drift eight and a half miles west of the destroyed railway bridge. Marching east they proceeded to turn the Boer right flank. Hutton then sent the New South Wales, the Queensland, and the New Zealand Mounted

Rifles straight forward to take the main and strongly defended Coetzee Drift, six miles west of the railway. A spirited assault against this difficult drift, situated between steep high banks sheltered by mimosa trees, took the colonials beyond the drift until they found themselves confronted by burghers on the heights overlooking the river.

Meanwhile the flanking movement pushing in on the Boer right forced the burghers to retire completely from the drift. The enemy still held certain kopjes on the south bank where the West Australians advancing at the head of the 11th Division were halted. Three field batteries called up cleared the kopjes by sundown. The day ended with the Boers falling back everywhere to the Zand River. By evening the whole of Hutton's force was across the river and the drifts secured. Hamilton crossed at Welkom Drift.

In a letter Lieutenant Samuel Harris, Second Western Australian Mounted Infantry, told of his experiences in the fight for the Vet River drifts: 'About three o'clock a message came from the General for an officer and two men to volunteer to find a crossing over the river. This meant a big risk as we had to steal right round and under the enemy's position. Eventually volunteers were called for among the officers, of whom there were 14, and I think they all offered to go. However, I was the selected one, and I was told I could take what men I pleased, so in turn I called for volunteers, and all of our boys wanted to go.

'I selected Corporal Harry Clarkson and Trooper Fred Bretag, and we galloped right round to the right and got into the bed of the river. Here I left the horses with Bretag and Clarkson, and had to crawl along on hands and knees for about half a mile, where I came to a crossing and found that if necessary we could take our artillery over.

'I wrote my report, taking care to note that the house close by was flying a white flag from the roof. I then galloped back after getting back to our horses.

'When I rejoined the boys, I found that we were to take the kopjes which command the drift over the river. We marched on for about 50 yards and got within 800 yards of the enemy, when we were greeted with a perfect hail of bullets. Down we went. There was not a particle of shelter but we all lay close. I can tell you that I never lay closer to anything, than I did to the ground when the firing was going on.

'We replied with volley after volley, and with good effect, for after a quarter of an hour, though it seemed a month, their fire ceased somewhat. We then advanced by rushes from the right, until our right flank was in line with the farmhouse that was flying the white flag. They opened up a hellish fire from this building, and being at close range it took effect.

'We then received the order to put in three volleys of magazine fire, fix

bayonets and charge, which we did. When we got on to the kopje their fire ceased to our cheers and cries of "Give 'em the steel boys". We all sat down behind rocks completely blown. And so ended the warmest bit of fighting for the day.

'When we took the kopje it was just dusk, and we waited until we were relieved by the Grenadier Guards, getting back to camp at midnight all terribly tired. Next morning I am pleased to say, the house from which we were fired at was blown up with all its contents.'

Troopers L. F. Hayward, John McCracken, and W. J. Neild were prominent in the capture of a Maxim gun, Hayward winning the Distinguished Conduct Medal and both the others being mentioned in despatches.

General Hutton sent a cable to the Premier of New South Wales on 16 May 1900, reading in part: 'I set them straight at the enemy still stubbornly holding on the river bank of the Vet. They were not to be denied and after a temporary pause they went straight at the enemy, turning him out, and then followed him helter-skelter to his next position in a deep spruit, from which they also turned him . . . It gives me great pleasure to offer you and your Government my hearty congratulations upon being represented by such fine soldiers.'

Hutton's Mounted Brigade, continuing the advance on the afternoon of the 6th, reached the Zand River in time to see the bridge blown up at both ends, the burghers having managed to rush the last of their transport across. A squadron of New South Wales Mounted Rifles rode up to an empty native African kraal within 500 yards of the river, but soon vacated it when the enemy began shelling.

The Zand River flowed 40 miles south of Kroonstad, the second town of the Orange Free State. The Boers decided to make what was virtually the defence of the town at the river. The Boer leaders, Botha, De la Rey and de Wet, gathered 5,000 men.

While President Kruger in Pretoria presided over what proved to be the last meeting of the Volksraad, the burghers in Kroonstad were urged forward to the front line by President Steyn with ringing words: 'It is better to die on the battlefield than to become slaves of your ancient enemy.'

With the army holding the south bank of the river on a 20-mile front General French crossed at Du Preez Drift on 10 May, 10 miles west of the railway. With him were the New South Wales Lancers, the Australian Horse and the New South Wales Army Medical Corps.

By advancing in a north-easterly direction French forced Botha to withdraw most of his strength from the centre. This allowed Roberts a comparatively easy task in crossing a rather steep-banked drift flanked with

⁵ G. B. Barton and others, *The Story of South Africa*, Vol 2 (1901), p. 268.

kopjes from which the enemy had earlier been firing heavily. On 12 May Roberts with the main army followed the cavalry into Kroonstad. Notwithstanding the attempt by French to cut off the retreat, the Boers were in full flight and succeeded in making good their escape.

Reporting from Kroonstad on French's flanking movement Paterson wrote: 'The idea was that he should get them and block their retreat, but in the open country a column could be seen 10 miles off, and there is no doubt that if French had moved a day earlier, the Boers would have moved a day earlier. There is no longer any credit for driving the Boers from a position. We have so many men that while we attack in front, we can send an overwhelming force to the rear, so they have to go. The thing is to catch up with them. The horses are so fagged that they cannot raise a charge at the end of a long day.'

The army waited 10 days for the completion of low-level deviations to the railway at Zand River and for repairs to the track, and supplies to be brought up. The plans for the general advance over the 500-mile front from Kimberley to Ladysmith had proceeded fairly well. In the west Methuen's column moved towards Mafeking. On 16 May Lieut-General Hunter crossed the Vaal at Christiana. Next day a flying column relieved Mafeking. Buller advanced slowly from Ladysmith, much too slowly for Roberts who wanted the Natal army at the Delagoa Bay railway when the army in the centre pressed on Pretoria.

Throughout the 130-mile march from Bloemfontein to Kroonstad men were falling out with enteric fever. Transport taking the sick and wounded to the railway was inadequate. Medical staff and supplies were also in short supply. Sergeant Satchwell, who rode to somewhere in the region of the Zand River with the Victorian Contingent before going down with enteric fever, wrote that the greatest drawback when on the march was water.

'This we could only get in dams which were attached to farms and it was not always the cleanest. On reaching a dam we always looked for a bit of fun. Somebody's horse would either get stuck, or else being unable to get a drink at the edge would, in spite of his rider, rush further into the water, which usually led to horse and man going out of sight in the large holes made in the bottom, similar to wells. This was an everyday occurrence and the unfortunate one had to sit in the saddle in that condition till the sun dried him.'

After being struck down by fever on the march Satchwell spent two days in a cart with no other nourishment than army biscuits and water until he arrived at a Field Hospital that was already full. He next found himself travelling with a convoy of 50 bullock wagons, each one carrying 9 or 10 sick or wounded men. In recording his experience Satchwell said: 'During the night, which as ill luck would have it was dark as pitch, our wagons

capsized by the kaffirs running the wheels over a ledge three feet high. Fortunately we were all thrown clear, and except for getting a severe shaking we were none the worse for our accident. The language used to the kaffirs for their bad driving was not of the mildest and under penalty of being shot they were careful during the remainder of the journey.'

Eventually the convoy reached Vet River station, stopping near the railway. The next morning the men were placed in open trucks in which they suffered day and night and were nearly driven mad by thirst. Satchwell recovered consciousness in the general hospital in Bloemfontein as a patient in a large tented ward and was invalided home in July 1900.⁶

On 22 May the army marched again. The Boers did not make a stand at Rhenoster River after making preparations to do so. For the next 80 miles to the Vaal River the soldiers marched unopposed. 'Banjo' Paterson described the incidents of the march:

'We pushed on through the open veldt, the long grass brushing against the horses knees and forming a dense carpet under their feet. This is the most wonderful grassed country I have seen. At all the farms the rafters were heavy with tobacco leaves making a pleasant fragrance, and we got ducks, fowls and turkeys galore.

'The class of men seemed to be worse than in the lower parts of the Orange Free State. The people live in mud houses and are very primitive in their notions of comfort. At every farm we found the owners at home, having given up their arms, and in every case the Boers said that they had left the commando and come home because their wives were sick. Such unanimous sickness among wives was remarkable but as the proclamation guaranteed immunity from molestation to all who laid down their arms, the Provost Marshals had all they could do to protect these men against robbery by the Tommies, who naturally enough look upon ducks, fowls and all such portable property as fair game on a march like this.'

On the approach of the mounted infantry Botha blew up the bridge across the Vaal River, having taken care to move all the rolling stock to safety. Believing that the enemy would make a determined stand before Johannesburg, Roberts switched Hamilton's column from the right. It crossed in front of his divisions in the centre to join Hutton and French on the left, in line with where he expected the most resistance to be met.

The army neared the river along a 20-mile front. Between 24 and 27 May 1900 crossings were made into the Transvaal by drifts to the west of the railway without any real opposition. General French arrived at Parys on 24 May and pushed on to Old Viljoen's Drift, where a crossing took place that afternoon. On 27 May the infantry with Roberts reached Viljoen's

⁶ See *On Active Service*.

Drift, the main drift on the Vaal and the nearest to the railway with easy banks and good fording. Paterson, riding with the Australian Horse and the New South Wales Lancers attached to French, wrote:

'At first sight the Transvaal was not an inviting place, being all stony, bare hills. We pushed on to Parys, an idyllic little town sleeping in the sun on the flats of the Vaal River. Here we got copies of the *Standard Digger News* of Johannesburg, which stated that the burghers would make the waters of the Vaal run red with the blood of the English. We then crossed the drift with General French at Viljoen's Lower Drift. It was the Queen's Birthday and everybody was anxious to enter the Transvaal that day, and so on the day we slept on Transvaal soil on a little piece of green flat enclosed by a semi-circle of rugged hills, having got over the steep banked drift with guns and wagons without firing a shot. Rum was issued to the troops to honour the event and our men as usual celebrated the event by singing. At lights out cheers were given for the Queen.'

Paterson also observed: 'The Australians are the only troops I have ever heard sing in camps. The soldiers' camp fire with a merry chorus is a fraud. There is nothing to make a fire as a rule, and if the men come upon an old wagon or cart at a farm, they break it up into fragments and carry them miles to the next camp to boil their billies. While manure is the usual fuel, there is not too much to be got at the farms here. The men are too tired to do anything but eat their usual meal and go to bed at once.'

The next morning, 25 May, the march continued along the river about six miles to Lindeque. On the previous evening the New South Wales Mounted Rifles and the New Zealanders had marched east through hilly country along the southern bank and crossed the river to Lindeque with Hutton's column by a difficult drift. The New Zealand Mounted Rifles, described by Paterson as 'probably the best troops in South Africa,' were sent to attack Boers in front of a big kopje. Some of the burghers rode a mile out on the open veldt. As the New Zealanders advanced the burghers still on the kopje began firing to cover the retreat of the riders on the veldt. 'I followed the New Zealanders', wrote Paterson, 'and saw a remarkable sight.'

'Most of the New Zealanders engaged in the front line were men who had just come over. They were fighting their first fight, and were desperately anxious to do something to put themselves on a par with the old New Zealanders who had seen no end of fighting. They killed two men and wounded two more and captured a few prisoners who lay down till they were overtaken and then calmly surrendered, quite happy to be out of the fighting. The behaviour of the Transvaalers in this affair bears out my theory that there is no vital difference between the Transvaalers and the Free State Boer. Either will fight well in a kopje, and neither will make a stand in the open.

'As soon as the pursuit ended the NSW Ambulance men, with young [Sergeant F. C.] Airey in charge, made an appearance on the field of action, and whipped away the wounded in short order. The New Zealanders had one man shot in the thigh. He was a young lieutenant having his first fight.'

Trooper Bridgen, a Sydney man serving with Brabant's Horse, was shot in the hip near Vereeniging on the Vaal. Bridgen took part in the relief of Wepener. He had previously served with the Cape Mounted Rifles in Bechuanaland in 1896. In that campaign he had received a wound in the face from an assegai and carried a scar reaching from the top of his left eye to his chin.

The columns were now marching very close to Johannesburg. From the hills beyond the Vaal the southern heights of the Witwatersrand lay separated by a wide valley through which flowed the narrow Klip River. The plan of battle called for French, Hamilton and Hutton to advance on the town by working around to the west. Roberts elected to follow the Pretoria railway passing due east of Johannesburg. A branch line from Elandsfontein Junction radiated a few miles west to Johannesburg. The junction of the Pretoria railway from Bloemfontein and the line from Natal into the Transvaal took place about 10 miles north of the Klip River.

Botha decided to make a stand on Klipriviersberg Ridge, a southern spur of the Witwatersrand, running east and west in front of the Klip River. The river was not deep but marshy ground on either side made crossings hazardous at anywhere other than the drifts.

Botha concentrated 3,500 burghers on Klipriviersberg opposite Jackson's Drift. The other drift on his front, Van Wyk's, rested 6 miles west of Jackson's Drift. Klipriviersberg was only a short distance from Johannesburg and outside the southern suburbs of Rosettenville and Turfontein. It was backed by hilly and broken country but so close to the town that sightseers travelled out, some even on foot, to view the action.

On 28 May French crossed Van Wyk's Drift and sent cavalry 3 or 4 miles beyond. The New South Wales Lancers led the advance to a point where a road ahead crossed the front 2,000 yards below the Boer position. They cleared the enemy from a farm building but found themselves exposed to flanking fire from the Boer right at Doornkop and rifle fire and a big gun on Klipriviersberg. Towards sunset when no further progress had been made French recalled the squadrons back across the drift.

Trooper H. E. Hindmarsh, a New South Wales Lancer, commented on the day's proceedings: 'On 28 May we were sent out to draw the enemy's fire. It was like going into a box with one end out, and we were sent to occupy, as it were, a spot in the centre. When we got to it the Boers fired on us from three different positions for an hour and a half, but we held on and got our guns into position, and you could notice the difference. The

Imperial officers were thunderstruck and did not expect to see us again. The Brigade Major (Major Edmund Allenby) says we must have charmed lives.' Trooper Hindmarsh later served in the Third New South Wales Mounted Rifles as a lieutenant. In the 1914-18 War Australians also served under Allenby when he led the British cavalry forces in Palestine. Later he became Field Marshal Viscount Allenby.

Mounted Infantry under Colonel T. D. Pilcher, with the Queenslanders attached, crossed by the Potchefstroom road drift. At this point the Klip was little more than a series of marshes, six miles above Van Wyk's Drift. Over the river Pilcher occupied kopjes commanding the drift. By holding his positions overnight his was the only corps to stay north of the river. The West Australians held the crossing at Jackson's Drift.

The next morning French moved up from Van Wyk's Drift and advanced north-west from the Potchefstroom Drift working around the Boer flank at Doornkop, about 7 miles west of Johannesburg near the locality where Jameson's raiders had come in.

The only real fighting fell to Hamilton's infantry making a direct onslaught on the ridges facing the Potchefstroom road drift. The Boers burnt the long grass covering sloping ground to destroy the slightest vestige of cover and to provide a blackened contrast to the khaki uniforms.

Over this ground the infantry advanced on the afternoon of 29 May. The enemy held a strong position backed by two heavy guns, several field guns and pom-poms. The brunt of the fighting fell to the Gordon Highlanders who after a mile and a half ran into heavy fire from 800 yards. The dislodging of the burghers cost 95 casualties. Robert Young, a soldier whose home was at Crows Nest, Sydney, fell fighting with the Gordons. He had also fought with the regiment at Magersfontein. By 10 o'clock that night all the wounded were under some kind of temporary cover. The Canadians were taken to the shelter of a kraal, and looked after by their own doctor. The troops bivouacked on the ridge in bitter night winds and woke to thick morning frost.

Three doctors from the New South Wales Medical Corps, Major Alexander MacCormick, Major Reuter Roth and Lieutenant Neville Howse, arrived to assist in the Brigade Field Hospital. They worked until 2.30 a.m. in bell tents by the light of lamps and candles. The following day the Corps set up temporary hospitals in some of the boarding houses in Florida, a suburb of Johannesburg.

An officer of the First Queensland Mounted Infantry described the events of 28 and 29 May: 'Things went rather quietly without much fighting until 28 May, when we reached Van Wyk's Rust, 14 miles from Johannesburg. We found the enemy here in force and in a strong position on the hills to our right. We could see our force on our right was making heavy

weather, and our cavalry and guns crossed Klip Spruit and retired with them.

'Not so Colonel Pilcher. We were on a range of stony ridges, which he considered should form a pivot of our right and left forces, and so he heliographed to the General that he intended to hang on. His force consisted of British Mounted Infantry, Queensland Mounted Infantry and a New Zealand Hotchkiss Battery. Colonel Pilcher was the only one of our people to hold his ground, and it was well he did so, for he enabled General Ian Hamilton who came up next day to attack the enemy's left.

'On Tuesday 29 May the enemy's right was attacked. I had gone out to look for General Hutton with despatches, and saw the splendid frontal attacks by our infantry. It was the experience I wanted most and I shall never forget it. Our good old infantry. How bravely and steadily they went in. The thin loose lines of khaki heroes pressing on with arms at the trail. What a murderous Mauser fire whistled through their ranks.

'Casualties were many, but the lads of Canada, the Cornwalls and the Gordons never faltered. They swept the position and the enemy took up another. This was also taken with a cheer, and the gallant Gordons got within 40 yards of the Boers before they could mount and scuttle away.'

Meanwhile, French took Doornkop on which the Boer right rested. The New South Wales Lancers and the Inniskillings cleaned up and tumbled pockets of burghers out of ravines sending them fleeing in the direction of Johannesburg. Paterson wrote: 'We saw them drop and get up and run again, and the men were wildly excited, calling out to each other. "Fire at the big mobs. Let the others go." Several dropped and lay dead, and the shells followed the others until they disappeared over the hill by the long line of mines.'

On the evening of 28 May Roberts camped with the main army at Klip River station. In a report to the War Office he stated: 'The enemy had just time to entrain five of their guns as some Western Australian Mounted Infantry dashed into the Klip River station.'

In the uncertain light at dawn on 29 May, Roberts sent Colonel Henry's 4th Mounted Infantry Corps, with a column of Australians, clattering out of camp with orders to seize the Natal railway junction at Natal Spruit and carry on to cut the line branching to Johannesburg from Elandsfontein. After a few miles shots were exchanged with Boers working three guns on a kopje. Declining to become seriously engaged the column pushed on through some sniper fire to the Natal railway four miles from the junction. Australian detachments working under sniper fire blocked the Natal line by rolling large rocks and mine timber on to the tracks; a matter of expediency pending the advance of the main army.

By 2 o'clock 20 of Henry's advanced scouts reached Elandsfontein railway yards where a number of engines had steam up. Riding forward the scouts

met with stiff resistance from burghers covering the rolling stock and found themselves hard pressed before the arrival of the column. The burghers fought well from buildings and sheds in the railway yard. When they were driven out the action spilt over into the streets of Germiston, a nearby township, where women hastily barricaded doors and windows.

Seven engines, 200 trucks and an ambulance train that was going out were taken. Lieutenant M. T. Kirby, a Victorian, was awarded the Distinguished Service Order for his part in the fight in the railway yards. A detachment of Second Victorians, Second South Australians and Tasmanians was heavily engaged against rifle and shell fire at the Black Reef Mine.

In the general advance, Brigadier-General J. M. Gordon's column veered wide to Boksburg and then swung left to cut across the railway going to Pretoria.

At the end of the day when Roberts arrived with the infantry the army held all the Johannesburg railway communications. With the British threatening the town from all sides the forces of Louis Botha, under De la Rey at Klipriviersberg, quickly retired back through Baragwanath seeking an escape to the north.

On the morning of 30 May Australian scouts rode in to take possession of the reservoir on the Doornfontein kopjes overlooking Johannesburg from the north. Lieutenant F. M. Rowell, South Australian Mounted Rifles, wrote: 'Making a long flanking movement under fire we succeeded in blowing up the railway to Pretoria at Elandsfontein. By this means we captured seven engines and a large quantity of rolling stock. We were complimented by Lord Roberts in General Orders next day.

'I left Elandsfontein with 50 South Australians, accompanied by a Captain and 50 Imperials, to find out whether or not the Johannesburg waterworks was occupied and to leave a guard over them. We left camp at 8 a.m. and no sooner had we started than we were fired on by Boers and had to fight from kopje to kopje all the way. When near the town I was told by the Captain to take the South Australians and seize the waterworks. Not knowing the exact position we galloped into the town, the South Australians thus being the first to enter Johannesburg. We were met by a number of British residents who showed us the position.

'We dismounted at the foot of a tall kopje, climbed up and took the place. A patrol of 100 men held the works all day. We had men down in the bushes at the foot of the kopje and among the houses and every now and then it was, "Hands up or I shoot". We captured 10 prisoners with arms and horses, also three wagons with forage and ammunition. We had orders from Kitchener to retire at 4 p.m. to our old camp so we had to fight a rearguard action until dusk. Three of the Imperials were wounded and four of ours missing, with two horses shot dead. The four stragglers returned to camp

at midnight so we were lucky to come out as we did. It was the hottest fight I have been in since we arrived and nearly all of us emptied our bandoliers before we retired.

'Next day Johannesburg surrendered. Colonel Henry with his staff marched ahead of the South Australian contingent under Major Charles Reade. Lieutenant George Lynch and myself took over the keys of the fort. The Union Jack was hoisted amid great cheering for the Queen. I had to take a list of all the arms and munitions of war in the fort, so I had a good chance to look around. The fort was well stocked with ammunition, and food was present in large quantities. We also captured 85 prisoners.'

Field Marshal Roberts demanded the surrender of the town and Dr Krause, the Town Commandant, rode out to Germiston. Roberts agreed not to attack or enter the town streets before 10 a.m. on 31 May in order to prevent the likelihood of street fighting with straggling armed burghers. The Commandant agreed to safeguard the mines which were still undamaged.

On the same day French and Hutton marched through Florida and Roodeport. They camped that night 10 miles due north of the town. Paterson summarised the feelings of the Australians who rode and fought with French's column: 'Then we marched along the Rand towards Johannesburg, proud in the knowledge that the Australians had done their share in wiping out the memory of the Jameson disaster, and had done it on the very ground where the disaster occurred.'

On the same afternoon the Queensland Mounted Infantry, crossing the Rand north of the town, saw five miles away a small commando with guns and wagons slipping north towards Pretoria. The Queenslanders gave chase and before nightfall completed the capture of Commandant Runck of the German Legion, together with a three-inch Creusot gun and gun wagon, 11 wagons loaded with military stores and ammunition and 23 prisoners. The colonials took the wheels off the gun and camped alongside it that night.

Anxious to get his correspondent's report away, Paterson was allowed to accompany a small patrol of Inniskillings from French's camp to the headquarters of Lord Roberts, 10 miles to the east. Starting soon after dark the patrol soon found two main roads across their path along which were moving streams of Boers retreating towards Pretoria.

The patrol managed to avoid the burghers and wagons on the roads and Paterson rode on in the dark with Lieutenant Johnson and six troopers. Before long they were hindered by wire fences on a farm. Near the farmhouse the horses stumbled into a ditch. The noise aroused the farmer who appeared in the doorway bearing a lamp in one hand and a rifle in the other not knowing that he was covered by an armed patrol only a short distance away. The farmer stood for some minutes looking anxiously into the night,

then closed the door and went back to bed. Without having to fire the shot that might have brought alert burghers on the trail, the patrol continued on its way. Finally Paterson and the soldiers, making slow progress by cutting all the wire fences in their way, approached the lights of a camp. Paterson and Johnson crawled on hands and knees towards the pickets, getting near enough undetected to learn that this was a British camp.

When he discovered that he was still several miles away from headquarters, Paterson left the camp with a single despatch rider. Unfortunately the pair became hopelessly lost and did not report to headquarters until 3 a.m. 'Banjo' thankfully spent the hours before breakfast sleeping under a stack of straw at the back of a building.

One other correspondent got through that night. Winston Churchill, with a price on his head as the result of his break from the prison at Pretoria, managed to ride a bicycle through the centre of the town when the streets were full of restless Boers.

On 30 May, while Boers near Germiston sniped at British outposts, the main body of the army rested. Corporal Arthur Parrott, New South Wales Mounted Rifles, went foraging with two companions. Late in the day they returned to find that the column had marched. That night the men stayed with a British resident outside the town. The following morning, 31 May, they rode into Johannesburg very early, and were received with great enthusiasm by British families who quickly arranged a welcome. The hospitality and dancing was soon interrupted by a Boer patrol appearing on the scene. The three Australians were marched off to prison.

Some hours later on a clear winter's morning the columns of the British Army, the infantry with bayonets fixed and gleaming, marched in from Germiston way to Government Square in the centre of Johannesburg. 'Banjo' Paterson rode with the Correspondents Corps along the Bezuidenhout Valley road and through the suburbs of Troyville and Jeppestown before the entry of the troops. The streets were almost deserted and the windows barricaded with timber. The correspondents were instructed by Roberts to go ahead as he wanted to ensure that the formal ceremony of the handing over of the keys of the town would be faithfully observed and recorded.

Close to midday on 31 May, in the presence of Lord Roberts, his staff and the assembled troops, the flag of the South African Republic in the Transvaal was lowered and the Union Jack raised. That night the main army camped 3 miles to the north near Orange Grove on the Pretoria road.

Lieutenant Rowell referred to 31 May and the following days: 'At 4 p.m. I left with Lance-Corporal Tom Rowell and seven men to patrol around the town and make sure all was quiet. So I had the chance to see the divisions with Lord Roberts at their head march through, and also the

town itself. We camped at Orange Grove, five miles out, that night. There we stayed and visited Johannesburg for two or three days. On the Saturday afternoon Jimmy Way and myself drove a buggy and pair, which we possess, into the town and had a good look around. We had afternoon tea at the President House Cafe. A string band was playing all the while. It cost only 7/- for two cups of tea and five or six pieces of cake. That is not too bad. We left Orange Grove on the Sunday morning for Pretoria.' (Trooper James Way later obtained a commission in the Imperial Army.)

Several weeks passed before the Imperial Light Horse rode into Johannesburg from Mafeking. The Uitlanders then returned in triumph to the town they had established, replete with battle honours. On 23 June the Imperial Light Horse camped at Meyer's Farm just beyond the southern suburbs near Klipriviersberg. Major Karri Davies recorded in his diary: 'Arrived Johannesburg 1 p.m., moved out 2.30 p.m., off saddled at Meyer's Farm at 6 p.m.'⁷ After the war the names of several hundred Uitlanders were honoured on a memorial erected at Saxonwold in Johannesburg. Some Rand men enlisted in Natal regiments. Refugees from the Rand also served in volunteer corps raised to defend Mafeking and Kimberley.

⁷ In the Africana Library in Johannesburg.



CHAPTER 11

The fall of Pretoria

In Pretoria the Volksraad had decided against making a firm defence of the town. On 30 May 1900 President Kruger and his officials departed for Middelburg on the Delagoa Bay railway line, taking with them the State archives and funds. Botha received instructions to delay the occupation for as long as possible while avoiding a serious engagement. The heavy guns on the line of forts along the hills surrounding the town were dismantled and removed. With some supporting field artillery Botha positioned 2,000 burghers as best he could.

One thousand miles now separated the army from the main base at Cape Town. Nevertheless, Roberts lost no time in marching the 35 miles between Johannesburg and Pretoria. The columns marched within a space of two days after the occupation of Johannesburg. By the evening of 3 June they were already half way to Pretoria. A check came in the late afternoon when with only an hour of daylight remaining the Natal Carbineers and Inniskillings at the head of the column were caught by rifle and gun fire after the enemy had retreated down a long narrow pass on the road a few miles beyond Kalk Heuvel. General French and his Staff were forced to retire back along the rough road as the Boers opened fire from both flanks.

Major Allenby was quick to call up a squadron of Inniskillings and the New South Wales Lancers, led by Major G. L. Lee. Joining the advance guard they dispersed along both sides of the road lined by rocky bush-covered ground. General French sent forward two guns and a pom-pom reinforced by the 4th Mounted Infantry. The gun fire and the clatter of rifle fire continued into the night with both sides replying to the flashes of the rifles. When the firing ceased the troopers slept on the rocky ground using their saddles for pillows. Before morning the Boers retired leaving some wagons and supplies on the road.

Trooper T. W. Breckenridge, a New South Wales Lancer, wrote: 'If there were one, there were fully twenty bullets buried themselves within six inches of me, and hundreds within as many feet. I myself fired over three hundred rounds, and most of our fellows about the same. My carbine got so hot that when I caught hold of the barrel by mistake, it stuck to my fingers, and I have the mark still of the beautiful blister it made.'

Under orders for a dawn start on the 4th, the Mounted Corps carried two days rations and forage. Given the objective of working his way to the north of Pretoria to cut the Pietersburg railway, French sent his cavalry brigade veering widely and riding 17 miles to the west through rough country. The New South Wales Lancers and the Australian Horse were attached to this column and the day passed without much incident. They camped that night 5 miles north of Pretoria.

The main force under Roberts kept closer to the railway and met with opposition at Six Mile Spruit. General Ian Hamilton in close support to the left of Roberts attempted to get behind the enemy. Once having found the extreme right flank he directed General Broadwood's Cavalry Brigade and Lieut-Colonel H. B. De Lisle's Mounted Infantry Brigade through a gap in the hills to reach the Boer rear. The colonial troopers under Colonel De Lisle took a shorter detour than Broadwood's men. De Lisle forced the issue by sending his Australian troopers up a steep, stony bridle track. Cheering as they went the troopers rode in a wild gallop for about 6 miles before entering the valley behind the enemy.

With Roberts and his infantry maintaining the pressure in front the burghers left the positions they held, falling back to Pretoria with the mounted infantry in hot pursuit. By 4.45 p.m. De Lisle reached Proclamation Hill about 2 miles west from the town, having taken prisoners and a machine-gun in his drive. The capital lay before them. That night the colonials camped among the rocks on Proclamation Hill. Broadwood, who had not thought the wild ride across the hills by De Lisle's troopers at all possible, did not come up with his cavalry until after dark.

Trooper Norman Sherard, First Western Australian Mounted Infantry, described the ride that ended at Proclamation Hill: 'We galloped that day

as we may never again, only dismounting to pour volleys after the flying Boers. I don't suppose I shall ever feel again the enthusiasm and excitement of that day's chase after the enemy. We were miles ahead of any other column. Our bullets were among the retreating Boers, and I daresay scattered the dust in the streets of the town.'

Delighted with the success of his exploit De Lisle immediately sent a young lieutenant of the New South Wales Mounted Rifles forward with a flag of truce to demand the surrender of the capital in the name of Lord Roberts. In a letter sent from Pretoria to his parents in Sydney the young lieutenant, W. W. R. Watson, gave a descriptive account of an eventful ride to demand the surrender of the capital of Paul Kruger's Republic in the Transvaal:

'After advancing a few miles the shells from seven miles away commenced to fall amongst us, so open was the formation of the day. But on we went, a little later coming under a heavy fire from field artillery, pom-poms and Maxims and rifle fire. Still on we went. We could see Lord Roberts' column on our right about six miles away, and they were catching it hot. Well, we gained a ridge, the last but one before Pretoria, and here the fire was so warm that for a time we sat under cover to gain breath for the horses and men, before making the last effort.

'Then came the order from General Hamilton, that De Lisle's corps, composed of ourselves, with the West Australians and the 6th Imperial Infantry, were to make a rapid flank movement round the enemy's right. Off we went, N.N.West, Colonel De Lisle and myself leading. We managed to get right round the back of their position.

'The Colonel then said: "See that ridge Watson, go and tell Antill to lead the regiment up there, and if you do not meet with too much heavy fire, carry on for as far as he thinks safe." Just as I moved at the gallop from him he shouted out, "Show the way yourself," and so I actually led the regiment.

'Holmes' horse, Dove's and my own, are the three finest in the regiment. We three led the way, followed by a crowd. The only weapon I had was a revolver. When the Boers saw us behind them, they fled in confusion and we followed in hot haste. I fired my revolver point blank at several, but as I was at the gallop, and they also, I did not hit them, although we took a great number of prisoners. By this time we were all speechless and our horses at a standstill, so we struggled up the last slope, and there three-quarters of a mile away lay the city. Colonel De Lisle came up beaming with delight and said: "Now lad you have done so well, are you fit to take the flag into the city and demand the surrender of the city in the name of Lord Roberts and the British Army." "Certainly," I said. So we tied a handkerchief on to a whip, and after saying good-bye to Holmes and the others, I

started for the Landrust of the capital, with the white flag in the air and unarmed.

'As soon as I advanced our boys stopped firing and watched (most anxiously, Holmes said) my progress. I had not gone far when I was stopped by an artilleryman, so requested him to take me into the town. He did so, but the Landrust (chief magistrate), the Burgomaster (mayor) and the Commandant General were still fighting on the hills about the city; so the Secretary of State was found and he conducted me to Commandant General Botha's private residence. He then telegraphed to their General to come at once to a council of war.

'First General Botha himself came, then Generals Meyer and Walthusien and the Military Governors of the City. By this time I had been there for two hours, during which time Mrs Botha kindly made me tea and sandwiches, which as I had not had a square meal for 36 hours were most acceptable.

'Now came the discussions of the Council. The General asked my mission, and this I told him with so much dignity as I could muster: "I come with a message from Lord Roberts demanding the immediate surrender of your Capital. If the surrender is forthcoming all persons will be respected, property uninjured. If not the bombardment of the city will take place at sunrise tomorrow morning."

'He gazed at me up and down and told me to be seated, while they all spoke on the matter, some of the Generals being very excited. They spoke in Dutch. However, after an hour's chat they drew up a letter and Botha informed me that if I would conduct the Governor of the City to Lord Roberts, terms and conditions could be arranged. So they all shook hands with me, and said I ought to be pleased at meeting their greatest statesmen and generals.

'Off I went with the Governor, General Walthusien, to Colonel De Lisle who was waiting on the outskirts of the city for my return. The Colonel then joined us and off we went to Lord Roberts who was 6 miles off. So we did not arrive until 10.45 p.m. He was in bed, so just sat up and said: "How do you do? If General Botha wishes to discuss with me the unconditional surrender of the town, I will meet him at Colonel De Lisle's camp at 9 a.m. tomorrow. In the meantime I will not fire a shot. Good night."

'We left them to be conducted back to town by the ADC, and Colonel De Lisle and myself returned to our post and slept on the ground, turning in at 12.30. Thus ended a most eventful day. I have now the celebrated and historical handkerchief, and on it received the autographs of Lord Roberts and of all the generals and chiefs of staff who took part in the operations on 4 June 1900 at Pretoria.'

On the next day Roberts entered the town with 26,000 troops. The Union Jack flew over Pretoria after an interval of 20 years. Lieutenant Watson left his account and impressions of the day's proceedings:

'Next morning, 5 June, Pretoria surrendered, and at 10 a.m. was full of British troops. Lord Roberts had expressed a desire that the New South Wales Mounted Rifles should form his bodyguard when he made his official entry at 2 p.m. and we were all ready to start when the order was countermanded, and our place was taken by another regiment. We were much disappointed, as we thought we were due for at least one of the posts of honour. Our division marched through the outskirts of the town, and camped about four miles to the eastward.

'Pretoria is an extremely pretty place, lying in a hollow with hills all round. The suburbs are beautifully laid out, and the houses are most picturesque, with their round turrets and wide verandahs in the midst of shady gardens, but at this time of the year the red dust pervades everything. We were received in absolute silence by the inhabitants, and it must have been a bitter pill for them to see a British Army parading through the streets.'

An English woman for many years a resident in the Transvaal wrote to a friend in Durban: 'It was a grand sight when our people entered Pretoria on 5 June. I will never forget the day before how I stood at our gate in Pretorius Street, and saw the British fire their big guns on the hills. A number of people climbed on to shop roofs to watch the sight. My neighbours got on my roof. Our house simply shook with vibration. The next day we were up in Church Square wearing the colours, to stand and see Lord Roberts enter. He came in with 50,000 men. It was a grand sight and I cannot describe our elated feelings. When our troops entered Pretoria I hoisted the flag close to our front gate.'

On 11 June the Royal Scots Fusiliers entered Potchefstroom, the old Transvaal capital, and hoisted the old Union Jack that had been ceremoniously buried in a coffin in Pretoria in 1881. It was recovered soon after and taken to England by Colonel Gildea, the commander in Pretoria, who left it with his regiment.

Early on the morning of 27 June a New South Wales Mounted Rifles advanced patrol under Lieutenant W. A. Newman entered Heidelberg and raised the Union Jack. Some arms were handed over before the arrival of the infantry about midday. At Heidelberg on 16 December 1880 the flag of the Transvaal Republic had been hoisted in insurrection and the town declared the temporary capital.

Although so frequently dispersed the Boers in the field were not broken. The problem before Roberts was still just as it had been ever since Paardeberg to bring them to a decisive battle. With the exception of the army in Natal, where because of his slow progress Buller did not occupy Volksrust, the

first Transvaal town in his path, until 12 June—a week after Roberts entered Pretoria—the Commander-in-Chief's plan had worked well. On 17 May a Special Force had relieved Mafeking. The advance from Kimberley penetrated into the western Transvaal as far as Lichtenburg and to Rustenburg, almost to the gates of Pretoria. Throughout this area the burghers were bringing in their arms.

The rapid advance from Kroonstad to Pretoria took place by leaving very few troops behind to protect the railway. General de Wet proceeded to make the most of his opportunity by cutting the track, destroying culverts and seizing stores wherever he could. Not the least of the destroyed material happened to be soldiers' mail and winter clothing. At one stage several miles of track were torn up, temporarily isolating the army in Pretoria from supplies.

A Victorian, A. Tregonning, wrote from Durban on 25 July: 'Our company of 72 Pioneers was sent on 6 June to Rhenoster River to put up a bridge for the railway at Roodeval station. We slept on the veldt all night in our clothes, rifles loaded and everything ready in case of alarm. At 4 a.m. there was a rifle shot, which meant a stand to arms. A Boer with a white flag rode in with a message from de Wet demanding surrender. He said he had 1,500 men and seven guns, and gave 10 minutes to reply.

'The fight commenced when we declined. They fired a 15-pounder gun, three more guns and a pom-pom, and shelled like fury. By 12.30 we had to surrender, with five killed and seven wounded from shell fire. We were walked 10 miles without food to avoid the British. Every day for 10 days we marched all day, camping in the open and living on fresh meat and a biscuit. In this way we marched about the Free State like a flock of sheep. We could hear British guns every day, and sometimes see clouds of dust caused by the British force.

'Sometimes we marched all night. Once the marching lasted throughout the night and on until seven in the morning, by which time we had covered 35 miles. Sometimes we were busy cooking when the order would come to be ready to leave in half an hour, as the British were coming. Then they found the British on top of us again, and we would march another five miles.

'On 20 June we left de Wet for Olivier of the Free State. We walked 22 miles to the laager. The food was mealie meal, biscuit and meat. At the end of June we were asked to sign a parole, to take an oath not to fight again. We refused. Then we were marched to the Natal border, and put over the border on 2 July, as they said we were only a nuisance, eating their food. On the first day we marched 35 miles. On 7 July we reached the road to Ladysmith, and met the Natal Mounted Police.'

Botha had taken his commandos on 5 June through Pienaar's Poort, a gap in a range of hills 16 miles north-east of Pretoria, through which passed

the Delagoa Bay railway. From Pienaar's Poort the range went north in a series of broken ridges before finally merging with the veldt. To the south-east the range bent away in the direction of Middelburg. The road to Middelburg took an almost parallel course to the railway.

The poorts along the range were well defended by the burghers. Along 20 miles of range and kopje Botha distributed 6,000 men with 22 field guns. Roberts was not at all keen to have such a large body of enemy troops so close, particularly when they commenced to send out probing patrols almost to Pretoria. He decided therefore to launch an attack to drive the Boers from the neighbourhood of Pretoria.

On 11 June the army advanced with infantry and guns on Pienaar's Poort with Hamilton's Mounted Infantry on the right flank and French on the left, with his cavalry and Hutton's Mounted Infantry. Roberts refrained from attacking strongly in the centre because he saw the Poort as a natural defensive position that could only be won after heavy casualties. He decided to contain the centre with batteries of long-range naval and heavy siege guns.

Roberts relied on the successful operation of long flanking movements 25 miles apart in an effort to find a way to threaten the rear lines. Anticipating the tactics of the British, Botha held both wings in strength. When French moved round to the north-east he was stopped at the entrance to the Kameelfontein Valley, where De la Rey waited on the surrounding hills. The burghers dug in on hills covered with dense thorn bush in a valley two and a half miles wide, 18 miles north-east of Pretoria. French with a force of 1,690 men and 12 guns found himself opposed by a larger force. His squadrons were below strength, weakly mounted on tired horses. By nightfall French held several low foothills with little chance of making further gains.

All the next day, 12 June, the Boers continued to block French on three sides. He called for reinforcements hoping for infantry support, but none came. The burghers stayed in the hills while the British artillery kept plugging away, although short of shells. The New South Wales Ambulance was damaged by a shell while actively supporting the troops in the front line. By the end of the second day French could still do no better than hold his own. Lance-Corporal Cuthbert Fetherstonhaugh wrote: 'On the 12th we had the pleasure of being shelled nearly all day, and could not get a show of firing at the beggars. Our Corps of Australian mounted infantry, together with the 6th Cavalry, were in the middle of a plain, and the Boers were in the hills, on each side of us. They lashed in the shells quick and lively, particularly at the cavalry.' (Fetherstonhaugh was later commissioned in the Third New South Wales Mounted Rifles.)

From Pienaar's Poort the range swung due east in a line covering from the south both the Delagoa Bay railway and the road to Middelburg.

Botha's left flank rested on Diamond Hill, a rocky plateau a mile and a half long running in front of Elands River station.

Early on 11 June Hamilton approached Diamond Hill from the south. The Boers had guns on the hill, and riflemen on a long, low subsidiary range running about a mile and a half in front of the main plateau. The fighting first came to close quarters when, taking advantage of local knowledge and the folds in the ground, Boer horsemen confidently attacked a battery of Royal Horse Artillery. They were driven off by a charge from the 12th Lancers.

The same afternoon, by taking cover in the long grass after each short sharp rush, infantry advanced to within three-quarters of a mile of the ridge before the burghers mounted their ponies and rode back to the plateau. That night the men of the Sussex, Derbyshire and City Imperial Volunteer Regiments camped on the narrow ridge vacated by the enemy.

Roberts now felt that Diamond Hill could be taken, so he directed Hamilton to increase the pressure. On the morning of 21 June the infantry advance continued pressing forward towards the main plateau under the cover of the guns but subjected to strong shell fire from the flanks and small-arms fire from in front. By noon the crest had fallen to the infantry attack and the plateau swept clear of the enemy. Only the extreme eastern end of the plateau remained in the hands of the Boers. More than a mile distant this plateau was called Rhenosterfontein.

Colonel De Lisle's Mounted Corps marched from Pretoria to a range of hills in front of Diamond Hill plateau called Tiger Poort Range. Sheltered by a series of hills shaped almost like a horseshoe, in a place the troops called Tiger Kloof, the Corps took no part in the events of 11 June. On the next morning they moved out into the undulating valley between their position and Diamond Hill and were onlookers when the infantry attacked the central plateau of Diamond Hill.

At 2 p.m. De Lisle ordered the advance against Rhenosterfontein by four squadrons of the New South Wales Mounted Rifles, with the West Australians in support. At first the movement went unnoticed. Then 350 troopers in the New South Wales squadrons, galloping widely across a broad, rolling grass-covered valley dotted with ant hills, came under fire while riding to a point where Rhenosterfontein Farm stood among gum trees.

Trooper Allan Cameron described the gallop across the valley to the farm: 'We were ordered to look to our girths and then the order came to mount and extend 50 yards. We then galloped in the direction of the kopje where the Boers were. We had some pom-poms covering our advance, and it was not long before puffs of dust began to fly off the ground, letting us know that the Boers were firing at us. It was a pretty sight to see the long lines of horsemen extended across the plain.'

'An amusing incident happened while we were going across. There was a mob of cattle feeding on the plain. The Boers took these for British horses and started pouring shell and shrapnel on them. The cattle ran around with their tails up in the air.'

De Lisle sent the pom-poms forward to the shelter of the Rhenosterfontein Farm wall. The New South Wales men dismounted and advanced on foot in extended order at intervals of 30 yards to the dead ground at the base of the plateau. At first the colonials gained some protection from the steepness of the ascent, but as they were scrambling up the face of an escarpment completely bare except where scantily covered by thin straw-coloured grass they soon ran into a hail of bullets.

The way to the top went by a series of rough, rocky terraces receding as they rose to the true crest where a long flat rocky plateau lay thickly strewn with stones. In the short grass on the slopes below the crest and on the plateau just over the crest the burghers fought from well-constructed stone sangars. Beginning to give ground, some dragged the dead and wounded with them in front of the colonials, who were reluctant to press the fire.

Lieutenant Newman gave the order to fix bayonets and charge. The enemy gave way everywhere before the point of the bayonet. In the fading light of the winter's afternoon they were driven down the long slope extending in the direction of the railway near Elands River station. Some of the Australians found themselves unable to fix bayonets, which had become either strained or bent as a result of tent pegging and other odd camp chores. Some got to close quarters using the rifle as a club.

Trooper E. M. Hoffman wrote: 'A real colonial yell went up when we got the Boers running, carrying their wounded with them. They had an easy slope to go down, so they were soon mounted and out of range.'

On 13 June Colonel De Lisle caused a Special Order of the Day to be issued to the 2nd Mounted Infantry Corps: 'Elands River station, 13 June 1900. General Hamilton Commanding the Force has desired the Commandant to express to all ranks of the 2nd Corps, and the Pom-Pom Section "A", his congratulations on their achievement on the evening of the 12th at Diamond Hill; of which he has made a special report to the Field Marshal Commanding-in-Chief. In publishing this, the Commandant wishes to express his high appreciation of the way Captain Antill and the NSW Mounted Rifles advanced to take the hill yesterday, and the gallant way the regiment pushed forward beyond the crest under a murderous fire. He deeply regrets the casualties, and especially the death of Lieutenant [P. W. C.] Drage when bravely leading his men.'¹

The First New South Wales Mounted Rifles lost two officers on Diamond Hill. Lieutenant W. R. Harriott was so badly hit that Sergeant G. H.

¹ F. Wilkinson, *Australia at the Front: A Colonial View of the Boer War* (1901), p. 199.

Fleming built a small stone shelter to protect him where he fell on the hill. Harriott died in the field hospital the next day. A plaque and memorial gates erected to his memory still stand at St Thomas's Church of England, North Sydney. Lieutenant Drage was killed soon after Harriott fell. He had previously served with the Bechuanaland Expedition in 1884-5 under Sir Charles Warren.

'Banjo' Paterson described how Drage and Harriott fell: 'Harriott and Drage stood up, urging the men on, and calling them by name. The men implored them to lie down, but they took no heed. They actually got their pipes and filled them, while the Boer bullets whizzed past and splatted in little grey patches on the rocks.' Trooper Ashton Douglas wrote about the burial of Lieutenant Drage: 'Fixing a coat over two rifles we laid him on it and carried him to the farmhouse where our horses had been taken. It was almost 2 o'clock when we finished digging his grave. He was a grand fellow and I was one of his favourites.'

Warrant Officer R. C. Holman received mention in despatches for gallantry; Staff-Sergeant John Wasson was mentioned for good work and bravery in scouting; Trooper F. W. Rudd for good scouting, and for rendering assistance to Harriott; and Captain W. R. Cortis, New South Wales Army Medical Corps, for rendering assistance under fire.

Trooper Allan Cameron who was hit in the chest by a bullet, wrote from a hospital in Johannesburg: 'Lieutenant Harriott and I with a couple more were making a general rush forward together, when down I went on my face with a terrific shock in my chest. I thought I was cooked. Then poor Harriott went down with a groan. When we went down someone said, "Forward NSW", and we were left behind.'

'I never saw the rifle fire so hot. It used to burst overhead like thunder and you could hear it buzzing amongst the rocks. After I was hit I spent an anxious three hours on the field, wondering how our chaps were getting on, as I could hear nothing but rifle shots among the rocks. When I was hit it was as though a cannon ball had struck me, it knocked all the wind out of me.'

Sergeant C. L. Braun told how he came upon a Boer waving a white handkerchief: 'He waved a white handkerchief and asked for water. I offered him a drink. He said, "Nay, my brudder." I had a look at his brother and poured water down his throat; he was bleeding from the mouth and he died quickly. The bullets were coming pretty close and shells bursting everywhere. So I got under cover and kept the Boer with me. He had thrown away his rifle and I took what ammunition he had.'

'I had a yarn with him in broken English. He told me his brother was a Field-Cornet and had three farms. While we were talking a shell burst very close. I told him to keep down, but he said: "The Lord watches me." I

said: "Yes but that won't stop you following your brother." Then there was a shout for me to bring on the prisoner. I made a start but the bullets were thick. A pom-pom struck near us and the Boer dropped on his stomach. He would not move despite the great profession of faith. Captain Maurice Hilliard told me to remain where I was. It was close on dusk and a little later "cease fire" was ordered.'

Trooper H. J. Dale briefly described the events of the day: 'To reach the enemy's position we had to cross a large open plain, the Boers opening out on us with a tremendous rifle fire. We were commanded to fix bayonets and charge. Lieutenant Harriott was shot in the thigh by an explosive bullet. The unfortunate officer, suffering agony, groaned most pitifully. That night we did outpost duty, and in the morning the Boers could not be found. Next morning we attended poor Drage's funeral, and laid him to rest in a garden shaded by wattle trees in bloom, a pretty spot. Harriott died under an operation to his wound.'

Reporting that Captain Holmes had received shrapnel in the arm, Paterson wrote: 'This officer has earned the highest commendation in every affair in which he has been engaged.' On 25 August 1900 Colonel De Lisle brought to the notice of the Commander-in-Chief, Lord Roberts, that Captain Holmes had 'on several occasions showed great military skill and personal gallantry. He is an officer of exceptional merit and capable of occupying a high command. Of all regimental officers who have shown themselves capable leaders I consider Captain Holmes ranks highest.'

William Holmes, the son of a soldier, was born at Victoria Barracks, Sydney. He began military life as a bugler at the age of 10; later he became commander of the 1st Infantry Regiment, New South Wales forces. In German New Guinea in 1914 he received the surrender of the Germans to the Australian Expeditionary Force. He served at Gallipoli. In France he became a Major-General, commanding the 4th Australian Division. On 2 July 1917, while conducting the New South Wales Premier, Mr W. A. Holman, around the battlefield, he was mortally wounded. Major-General Holmes was buried in the military cemetery at Armentieres. He won the Distinguished Service Order as a Captain in South Africa.

When Botha heard of the breakthrough on Diamond Hill he knew that when morning came Hamilton would mount guns on the plateau and shell the entire Boer defences in a sweeping line from end to end. He therefore withdrew everywhere overnight, getting his guns away towards Middelburg by the railway. A detachment of 150, mainly West Australians under Major Moor supported by a patrol from 'C' Squadron, New South Wales Mounted Rifles, pursued the burghers for fully 10 miles to within two miles of Bronkhorst Spruit station. They surprised the rearguard in a laager and peppered them with rifle fire until their bandoliers were emptied. This was the only pursuit of the Boer forces.

The British casualties at Diamond Hill were not more than 200, in what was one of the last pitched battles of the war.

Trooper J. Sutton, an Imperial Light Horseman, never charged with a bayonet across the plateau on Diamond Hill. Nevertheless, he left an account of the many uses found for the bayonet by irregular troopers. (A Melbourne man, Sutton had had seven years experience in South Africa in pre-war days, before enlisting in 'D' Company, Imperial Light Horse. At the time of the Jameson Raid, Sutton was in Johannesburg. In 1896 he had served with the Bechuanaland Mounted Police in the Matabele War. He fought with the Imperial Light Horse at Elandslaagte and at Wagon Hill. He also served with the regiment at the Relief of Mafeking.)

'At times we get plenty of eggs, milk and sheep, and Kaffir melons. The latter are very much like a water melon, only yellow inside, with black and yellow seeds. They were splendid during warm days. On coming to a mealie patch where the melons are also planted, we used to fix bayonets and pick up the melons in this way whilst on horseback. The bayonet is a very useful implement, it serves a variety of purposes for which it was never intended. Although we have never stuck it into a Boer, it comes in handy for splitting wood, breaking bones in meat, tethering horses. (We don't do this but some of the Australian troops do.)

'Then you can pin your blanket down when you sleep double bunk, so your sleeping partner does not sneak your share. Cutting up pumpkins, Kaffir melons, and stirring the soup. A steel for sharpening. Knocking over fowls at deserted farmhouses, and other small game. Jogging up led horses, and tin opening. Fancy the British War Department manufacturing such a useful implement for their soldiers. I really don't know what I should do without mine.'

CHAPTER 12

The Boers surrender in the Orange Free State

After the battle of Diamond Hill Lord Roberts and the army returned to Pretoria. The immediate problems were twofold. The cavalry and mounted infantry urgently required remounts in order to regain their effectiveness as a striking force. Secondly, the long line of communications from the Orange Free State had to be cleared and kept open, for wherever a weakly guarded length of the railway could be found the burghers, led by de Wet, appeared in raiding parties, pulling up sections of the track or attacking groups of soldiers engaged in reconstruction. In order to keep his communications secure, Roberts distributed troops along the railway between Kroonstad and Pretoria.

When strong commandos assembled in his rear in the eastern hills of the Orange Free State, Roberts felt compelled to engage them before transferring the weight of the army against the Boer forces that had retreated into the eastern Transvaal. The commandos held strong positions where the eastern slopes of the Drakensberg mountains rose from the plains of the Orange Free State, 120 miles north-east of Bloemfontein.

In this hilly country several divisions under General Hunter blocked a number of neks and succeeded in surrounding the commandos. On 30 July more than 4,000 burghers under General Marthinus Prinsloo laid down

their arms, surrendering unconditionally. The army took, in addition, 4,000 horses and 1,000,000 rounds of ammunition. This constituted the second great defeat inflicted on the Boer forces in the war. The losses in men ranked with Paardeberg. More than 8,000 burghers were now prisoners of war, a serious loss in view of the rather limited manpower available to the Republics.

'Banjo' Paterson described the surrender of the Boer army: 'At last an envoy came in with a white flag, and asked to see the General. He wanted a four-day armistice which was refused. He wanted terms and conditions, also refused. He wanted to know if those Boers who had no blankets could send Kaffir boys for them to their farms. "Blankets", exclaimed the General, "you'll be asking for terms about your umbrellas next. If you fall into my hands I will treat you as well as I can, and I will recommend Lord Roberts to show you mercy."

'And then the Boer envoy, after stating that he must go back and get authority for this and that and the other, produced from his pocket an absolute unconditional surrender of all the Boer forces in the Caledon Valley, about 6,000. That is why the troops are singing and the bands playing.

'About dusk we saw the Boer army with wagons and guns, toiling along a huge spur of the hills, coming in to surrender, and so tonight the troops are making merry. It is not like Paardeberg where we lost 1,200 men in one day's fight. Here we have fairly manoeuvred the Boers and with very slight losses have cornered them, and forced them to surrender.

'The prisoners filed past rows of soldiers to lay down their rifles. The burghers varied in years from grey-bearded men to mere boys between 11 and 12 years of age. With them came many women and children almost black with sun and exposure. They had been crying and they formed a pitiful procession as they filed off into the prisoners camping ground. Off duty soldiers changed English pennies for rare Kruger pennies and other English coins for the coins of the Republic.'

Towards the end of July the army began a move east from Pretoria to where Botha's commandos were laagered some miles beyond Bronkhorst-spruit, five miles south of the railway.

Lord Roberts marched close to the railway flanked by Hamilton on the left and French on the right. With orders to cut off the enemy's line of retreat through Middelburg, French sent his mounted columns riding hard to the south-east to turn the Boer left flank. To effect a surprise Brigadier-General J. R. P. Gordon's 1st Cavalry Brigade made the widest turning movement, covering more than 20 miles. Favoured by the cover of fog, the brigade met with no opposition in securing a crossing on the Wilge River at Dieplaagte Drift. Despite some opposition beyond the river, French's entire force camped that night on the eastern bank. However, the

enveloping movement failed to prevent Botha withdrawing his forces and baggage safely out of danger.

Lieutenant Alfred Ebsworth of the First Australian Horse was killed in the skirmishing on the eastern bank of the Wilge River on 24 July 1900. Trooper F. F. Bashford wrote: 'We were in a valley. It was 5 p.m. and was beginning to get cold. We had to light the grass to see where to dig the grave. In the dark at 8 o'clock they brought him up on a stretcher by the light of a dull lantern, and it was indeed a sad sight to see. We had to go a mile to get water to make tea and then go to bed late.'

In August General French established himself at Middelburg. At the same time General Buller moved up into the Transvaal from Natal.

Lieutenant W. S. Rich went to South Africa as a trooper in the First New South Wales Mounted Rifles before gaining a commission in an Imperial regiment. He described the entry into Middelburg: 'Two days later we entered Middelburg and received the keys of the town from the only official present, the Boers having decamped the previous night. The English houses were decorated with flags and the Anglican clergyman stood by his church and welcomed Generals French and Hutton who rode in together accompanied by their staffs. I was carrying the General's Lance that day.'

Trooper G. A. Ebeling, a Victorian, also recorded his impressions of the entry into the town: 'Middelburg is a very English town about as large as Avoca, and built on two streets and is in the shape of a triangle. Very nice shops and villas and mostly English, Scotch or Irish signs. As we marched through the other day, we noticed a shop with a large sign: "H. A. Chapman. Australian bootmaker and harness maker." We turned in our saddles and gave him a cheer.' Ebeling was later commissioned lieutenant in the Fifth Victorian Contingent and also served in World War I, reaching the rank of Major in the 8th Battalion AIF.

Having forced the Boers to release their hold on Natal, General Buller advanced from Laing's Nek to the Transvaal. With French and Hamilton co-operating, Roberts followed the Delagoa Bay railway towards the Portuguese East African border at Komati Poort. They were joined by Buller who, having left Ladysmith in the first week in May, arrived on the Vaal River at Standerton before advancing through Belfast.

At Laing's Nek Buller halted to repair the railway and to bring up supplies. He next informed Christian Botha, the Boer leader and a brother of the Commandant-General, Louis Botha, that further resistance must only result in needless bloodshed. During the armistice that followed both men met to confer in the stone cottage on O'Neill's Farm at the foot of Majuba where the peace negotiations had taken place in 1881. At the end of three days of fruitless talks hostilities recommenced.

Rather than attempt a frontal attack, Buller went through Botha's Pass thus turning the Boer line at Laing's Nek and Majuba. Captain Fitzpatrick,

the Special Service Officer from New South Wales on Buller's staff, described the action: 'In the afternoon there was a general advance. The Boers poured in a terrible fire on the advancing infantry, and they kept their pom-poms well served. Ridge after ridge was taken by the intrepid British infantry until the last one came in view, and then with a mighty cheer they rushed it with the bayonet. Victory was ours and Majuba and Laing's Nek turned.'

'The Boers burned the grass to cover their retreat, and the nature of the country prevented the cavalry getting at them. We bivouacked in the position and next day marched and joined hands with General Clery at Laing's Nek. During the march we came across many wounded and dead Boers terribly burnt. They had been burnt by their own people—caught in their own grass fires and burnt to death. Some farmhouses had to be burned owing to their flying many white flags and firing on our troops.'

'So ends the campaign in Natal. It has been a hard time for us all.'

Trooper Fred Marshall wrote to his mother, in Gundagai, from Wakkerstroom camp on 17 June: 'You will see we have done some marching since my last letter written from Ingogo. At the time of my last letter we all thought we would make a frontal attack and cross Laing's Nek. Finding the Boers too strongly entrenched we made a flank movement round Botha's Pass. We completely outflanked the Boers, beating and driving them back wherever they made a stand. It took us five days to reach Volksrust, the border town on the Transvaal side, situated at the foot of the historic Majuba.'

'The day we left Ingogo we came in touch with the Boers. Our Maxims had to climb a high and rough kopje, arriving in time to open fire on a body of about 1,000 Boers. Our six Maxims, Thorneycroft's two, and two of the infantry's, opened fire at the short range of 2,000 yards. After one hour's continuous firing we accounted for 40 dead and 12 wounded. To complete the rout the field artillery arrived and shelled the retreating Boers. Lord Dundonald was pleased with the way we worked the guns.'

'On the 10th, half way between the pass and Volksrust, we came in touch with a strong force of the enemy. At long range we opened fire with our 4.7-inch Long Toms, field artillery, etc., and were hard at it for eight hours. In taking up a position on the right flank the Boers spotted us and opened fire with their artillery. The third shot from the Boer gun burst within 10 yards of the Maxim, wounding my No. 2 and damaging the Maxim and carriage. The next shell in bursting killed two men and wounded several. After that we retired to good cover. After an hour's rest a helio message was flashed for two guns to assist the composite regiment on the right flank three miles away.'

'We limbered up and galloped away at full speed, arriving just in time to stop the Boers from working round on our left flank. We were soon in

action and under a withering fire drove the Boers back when our artillery opened fire. The artillery fired 275 rounds of shrapnel shell. This was the battery attached to the 3rd Mounted Brigade. When the Boers were driven back and beaten we reconnoitred the position and found 142 dead Boers besides hundreds of wounded.'

'When we were fighting on the flank, Buller was making a frontal attack with 4.7-inch guns, doing terrible execution. The day following this decisive engagement our men buried 420 Boers. It was a terrible day's work, but it cleared the way to Volksrust.'

Louis Botha's commandos were being forced back towards mountainous country near the Portuguese border. Trooper W. M. Ellis, a New South Wales Lancer, wrote: 'We have been one month on the move from Pretoria and are about a day's ride east of Middelburg, making for Komati Poort on the Portuguese border. We are doing outpost duty, the Boers being in force in front of us. We are four miles ahead of the rest of the Brigade, the outpost consisting of NSW Lancers and Inniskilling Dragoons.'

In the last week in August the forces under Lord Roberts advanced east from Belfast towards the long line held by the Boers in hilly country to the north and south of the Delagoa Bay railway. From the flank south of the railway Buller, acting on information received from a Hussar patrol, decided to turn in a few miles to the north and attack a position forming part of the Boer centre at a farm called Bergendal, just south of the railway.

An outpost was held by 74 ZARP, behind sangars on a rocky plateau. The farm buildings behind were occupied by another 100 ZARP. On the left they were flanked by a foreign corps and the Germiston commando, making a total of 400 men. The position was supported by a few guns, including a pom-pom and several Maxims. All told the British were opposed in this sector by just under 1,000 men. Buller had 8,000 men. He was able to dispose his 38 guns to command the entire Boer position.

At 11 a.m. 27 August the guns opened fire on the plateau and a line of trees surrounding Bergendal Farm in what was otherwise bare country. The concentrated shelling continued for three hours, isolating the ZARP from support that may have been forthcoming, and forcing them to stay close under cover. The position was won by an infantry advance with the bayonet under gun and rifle fire down a slope and across broken ground to the ridge and the farm, where some of the ZARP still hung on bravely.

The battle of Bergendal resulted in the breaking up of the Boer line everywhere. By nightfall the burghers were in full flight north and south of the railway.

Trooper Marshall, attached to Dundonald's machine-gun section, wrote to his mother: 'Van Strekerk's Farm, Transvaal, 31/8/00. Since my last letter we have had a hard fight in which one of the Colt's men was wounded. The

battle is called Bergendal. We lost heavily but not more than the Boers. After the battle we were allowed to see the Boer stronghold, and the scene before our eyes made the most bitter of us have a little sympathy for the poor misguided Boer.

'The Boers held a strongly entrenched position. Our artillery included 6-inch howitzer guns throwing lyddite. They bombarded the position, but the Boers killed and wounded dozens of our infantry. Every Boer in the trenches before our eyes was either killed or stupified. The killed were lying about in dozens. It was a gruesome sight — a sight that would soften the hardest heart.

'After we had beaten and routed this Boer force we chased them as far as Machadodorp. We camped one night, and resumed our chase as far as Nooitgedacht. Buller's force was on their left flank and French on the right. We have been continually on the move since leaving Ingogo. A ride of 12 to 14 hours is almost of daily occurrence. Reg Smith of Gundagai is still with us. A young chap from Tumut named Bowen is also here.'

The Victorians arrived at Komati Poort on 24 September, with their horses almost at the end of their tether owing to the extreme heat and the severe demands made upon them. At the border large quantities of railway rolling stock were taken, and a great amount of ammunition found and destroyed.

When Botha slipped away into the north-eastern Transvaal the entire railway from Pretoria to the Portuguese border passed into British control. On 28 September the Guards Brigade left the border by rail to return to Pretoria. On the same day, in the presence of the Portuguese Governor-General, all the camped troops took part in a review in honour of the birthday of the King of Portugal.

After the fall of Pretoria, President Kruger moved the seat of Government and his own place of residence to a specially fitted railway carriage at Machadodorp along the Delagoa Bay railway. At the end of June the president left the high veldt for a more favourable climate in a deep valley at Waterval Onder. To arrive at Waterval Onder, the railway descended from Waterval Bovan by means of a cog wheel track through a long tunnel. On 30 August General French advanced to Waterval Bovan. He also occupied Waterval Onder, where snipers concealed in the cliffs and heights above the valley gave the troops an uncomfortable time.

Paul Kruger fled ahead of the troops, passing through Nooitgedacht on his journey to Lourenco Marques. In his 75th year, the old man made his last trek. He began his first trek as a small boy in his father's ox wagon to escape British law, and to found a new country beyond the Vaal. He opposed the policies of President Burgers, and for most of the 18 years of his term as President in which he guided the policies of the Boers beyond the Vaal, his Government was at variance with the British. Less than a year had elapsed

after his ultimatum to the British Empire when he embarked on a Dutch warship, thus passing to permanent exile in Europe.

In the first week in September, Lieut-General R. Pole-Carew took over from French at Waterval Onder. On 3 September the West Australians, forming part of Colonel Henry's Mounted Infantry Brigade, unsuccessfully attempted to dislodge the Carolina commando from strong positions in the hills south of the railway station at Waterval Onder. In an action near a farmhouse five West Australians were wounded. They were taken to a small but well-appointed hospital at Waterval Onder. Sick and wounded burghers were being cared for at the hospital, which in normal times was used mainly by workmen from the railway. The town itself was very small, the number of modest houses being less than 20.

General Pole-Carew visited the West Australians. Standing by the bedside of Trooper Harold Force, the General informed the young Australian that he intended to recommend him for the Distinguished Conduct Medal. Overcoming for the moment the suffering from his severe wounds, Trooper Force told the General: 'This has done me more good than medicine.'

Trooper Force, First Western Australian Contingent, succumbed to his wounds on 14 September 1900. He rests to this day in the lonely tree lined cemetery at Waterval Onder. An English padre, the Reverend E. Lowry who visited Harold Force in the hospital, described him as 'a magnificent young Australian'. He was Mentioned in Despatches but could not be awarded a DCM posthumously although the recommendation went in as promised. Field Marshal Lord Roberts mentioned the 'gallant behaviour of Trooper Force on 3 September' in his despatches. He also directed the Military Secretary to write from Army Headquarters in Pretoria to the soldier's mother in Fremantle.

Near a farm called Onderste Poort directly beyond the northern outskirts of Pretoria, a young New South Wales soldier fell in action when a party of burghers wearing British uniforms deceived an approaching patrol. Undistinguishable from non-combatants by their lack of uniforms, the burghers showed early in the war that they were not unwilling to wear British khaki in the field.

Originally attached to the Scottish Rifles in Sydney, Lieutenant K. K. Mackellar became committed to a military career by applying for a commission in the Imperial Army. When the war broke out Mackellar, still in Australia, was about to join the Gordon Highlanders in the Punjab. Before he could do so the Highlanders were posted to South Africa. On 17 January 1900, Mackellar sailed with a detachment of the Australian Horse. After taking part in the advance to Pretoria from Bloemfontein, he accepted a commission as second-lieutenant in the 7th Dragoon Guards.

When a farmer from the north of Pretoria rode into town seeking protection from a party of armed Boers in his neighbourhood, Mackellar

volunteered to accompany a patrol to the farm. In the action on the morning of 11 July 1900 Mackellar was shot. A young Australian, only 19 years old, he was the son of Sir Charles and Lady Mackellar. (His sister, Dorothea Mackellar, is best remembered for her well known poem, 'My Country'.) In 1905 the remains of the young lieutenant were moved from the military cemetery in Pretoria and placed in the family grave at Waverley cemetery in Sydney overlooking the sea near where he started on the voyage to South Africa. In the old and historic church of St James in the city of Sydney a plaque and a very fine window also serve as memorials to his sacrifice.

In a letter from Pretoria to Sir William Lyne, the New South Wales Premier, Captain R. R. Thompson, of the Australian Horse, wrote: 'On the morning in question the 7th Regiment (Dragoon Guards) was guarding the northern approach to Pretoria, and a squadron was sent to reconnoitre a certain farm. Young Mackellar who had been there the day before with another squadron, volunteered to go out and show the way as he knew the ground.

'All went well until the advanced patrols approached the farm, which they saw was full of horsemen wearing khaki helmets and jackets. The patrol got within 50 yards of the enemy, for such they proved to be, when the latter opened fire. Captain Church was shot in the shoulder and died here on the 19th. Lieutenant Chomley was wounded in the thigh, and also had two bullets through his jacket, two more through other parts of his clothing, and one in his saddle.

'Mackellar and the rest got into a donga where they opened fire and kept the Boers at bay for some time. At last the enemy worked round their flank and it was then that poor Mackellar got a bullet through the back of his head and fell dead without a groan. Some others were killed at the same time. At Mackellar's side were 30 empty cartridges, so the poor boy died fighting to the last.

'We brought his body in that night and laid him to rest in Pretoria cemetery at the foot of one of his native gum trees. Just before the funeral I met Wilkinson of the Australian Horse and he at once went off and got all his men, who followed the hearse. The coffin was laid in its resting place by three of the Dragoon Guards and three of the Australian Horse, as well as by Mr McGee, a Sydney man at present a trooper in the Imperial Light Horse.'

The capture of Pretoria made possible the release of 158 officers held in the town, and a further 3,029 men from a prison camp at Waterval, about 14 miles further north. An additional 900 prisoners had already been moved by the Boers by rail to Nooitgedacht in the eastern Transvaal. These men were later released during the course of the thrust towards Komati Poort. Trumpeter Harry Haycroft, a Victorian Bushman reported missing near Koster River on 22 July, was released from Nooitgedacht.

Trooper William Wise, a New South Wales Citizens' Bushman who was also a prisoner at Nooitgedacht wrote: 'While commandeering stock and forage near Magato Nek on 18 July we came under fire. The Boers were firing at us something awful. After we had gone about seven miles my horse fell with me, but I got him up again and started off. I was away behind my mates then, and the Boers were all shooting at me.

'At last they hit my horse and brought him down. I got up and ran for about 50 yards. The Boers were coming very close and began mowing the grass all around me with bullets. As I had no chance of getting away I threw myself down on the grass. They thought they had shot me. I tried to get under cover by crawling, but before I could do so, five of them rode right on top of me. Four of the Boers wanted to shoot me, but the other would not let them so I was taken prisoner. They captured one of my mates at the same time.

'When they sent us on to Machadodorp they had a party of nine of us altogether. They took us through Waterval Bovan and on to Waterval Onder, then to Nooitgedacht. All the prisoners were there and we remained together 11 days before we were released. We could hear the big naval guns for nearly a week before the British arrived. After we were released we marched about 15 miles to Waterval Bovan, where we boarded a train to take us to Pretoria. I was lucky not to be in their hands for as long as some poor fellows were; for instance the Irish Fusiliers and the Gloucesters who were captured outside Ladysmith and were prisoners for ten months to the very day.'

When General French returned to Machadodorp from Komati Poort he swung to the south and re-entered Carolina. The day before entry into the town, Trooper F. Avar, an original New South Wales Lancer, was severely wounded when a patrol of six New South Wales Lancers, led by Lieutenant R. M. Heron, came under fire on a high stony kopje. The next day Avar was taken to Carolina by ambulance. His wound was so bad that he could not be moved. He was left behind in the town when the force marched on to Ermelo and Bethal, where some active fighting took place.

Soon afterwards, when the New South Wales Lancers returned with French to Carolina, they learned of the death of their comrade. They found the grave covered with flowers left by the prominent burghers of the town. Dressed in top hats and frock coats, the burghers had buried the Australian with reverence. Trooper Avar was one of 'The Fighting 28'.

The prison camp at Waterval lay within sight of the Pretoria to Pietersburg railway line. A spruit flowed within the boundaries of the enclosure, from which water was drawn for the camp supply. The drainage outflow from the latrines found its way into the stream. This neglect or lack of knowledge of sanitary requirements on the part of the Boers contributed to the

dysentery and to the outbreak of enteric fever among the prisoners. At one stage 300 men were in the camp hospital, and a further 68 were buried in the camp cemetery during the course of the few months of the camp's existence.

A New Zealand trooper, H. Valentine, complained: 'They had not even taken the trouble to erect sheds over the pit, although the latrine was in full view of the public road and the railway.' Trooper Valentine listed the weekly rations of the prisoners as: 'Two pounds of meat, three and a half pounds of bread, two pounds of mealie, one-quarter pound of rice; ground mealie meal and chicory that was known as coffee, occasional issues of flour, and sugar issued irregularly.'¹

The camp was built with two enclosures: one in which the men slept, and a larger compound that became the exercise yard. Both enclosures were surrounded by barbed wire entanglements, and lines of electric light poles. The inner compound was divided off into a number of streets with rows of sheds. Outside the sheds, ovens made from mud were used for cooking in pots and pans supplied by the camp guards. Firewood was always scarce and came by train from Pietersburg. The lines of streets between the sheds were given names, such as Colenso Street, Kimberley Street, or Stormberg Avenue, usually after the action in which the occupants were captured. Blankets were scarce, so that the men slept mainly in their clothes. When heavy rain fell some of the huts became flooded, and the men sat up all night.

About 250 guards were camped outside the barbed wire entanglements. On the top of a slope near the camp a Maxim and two pom-pom guns were mounted with a continuous guard. At various times a total of about 100 prisoners succeeded in escaping from the compound, but most were captured and taken back. The Governments of Australia and New Zealand wired money for the men through the American Consul. This enabled extra food to be bought from the guards, who sold the produce brought from their farms. A Queenslander succeeded in faking pennies so that they looked like half crowns, good enough counterfeit with which to deceive the guards when buying food.

The men played cricket until the ball was lost. Then someone burned the bat and stumps for firewood. 'Crown and Anchor' became popular with those who held the cash. Other enthusiasts turned to 'Housie'.

Everything was tried, though without much success, to keep down the lice and other pests, even to boiling clothes in tobacco juice.

Sometimes English ministers of various denominations were allowed in to hold church services. Although closely watched they generally managed to pass on the latest war news, or even to smuggle in an old newspaper. They also undertook to post letters. The Roman Catholic priest, however,

was banned from the camp and expelled from the Transvaal, because of his too open sympathy with the prisoners.

Attendance at the impromptu concerts was always good. The Queen's Birthday on 24 May called for a special effort, so that the veldt really rang with the enthusiastic singing of 'God Save the Queen', followed by three thunderous cheers.

About this time, when the attitude of the Boer guards began to change, the men guessed that a relief column must be approaching. The roofs of the sheds were soon crowded with men staring anxiously out across the veldt. Meanwhile to explain away the sound of distant gunfire, the guards insisted that the guns at the forts in Pretoria were practising. Then came the morning when the crack of the Lee-Metfords was heard. Soon after, the Commandant left the compound with a white flag and the guards began to throw down their arms. The Scots Greys and the New South Wales Lancers were the first of the relieving mounted troops to appear. Then a train to remove the hospital cases to Pretoria steamed up. Trooper Valentine reported: 'The scene that followed baffles description. Some gave vent to their joy by cheering. Others wept and others swore profusely, but with no originality. The Boer flag was pulled down and torn to shreds, all of us scrambling for a piece of it. Those who had been fortunate to find food lighted fires and started to cook a meal for themselves and their visitors. We now had the pleasure of seeing our late guards surrounded by cheerful Tommies whose bronzed faces showed only too plainly that they had fared better than we had. The guards naturally looked sullen and said very little. Nor did Tommy, I am proud to say, chaff them on their changed positions.'

Then the Boer gunners began shelling the camp, one shell landing in the middle of the compound. The men started running in the direction of Pretoria clearing out as fast as their condition would allow them, though the softness of the ground prevented many shells from bursting. Many of the prisoners hardly knew where they were; some of the men dropped on the veldt from sheer exhaustion. At last British batteries went into action. Crowded trains then took the men to Pretoria. Trooper Valentine reported that some of the most successful camp gamblers 'swilled their gains away at hotels till they were discovered by the temporary police, who rounded them up'.

One of the prisoners, Lance-Corporal J. E. Fraser, of the New South Wales Mounted Rifles, wrote: 'It was a glorious sight to see our relief column of NSW Lancers and Scots Greys coming over the hill, and to observe our Boer guards throw down their arms. We were relieved on 6 June, and were no sooner free than we had a Boer "Long Tom" shelling the camp vigorously. As you can imagine, we had to be very careful of what we wrote in captivity, or it would never pass the strict Boer censorship. As

¹ From his book, *Ten Weeks a Prisoner of War* (1901).

a matter of fact living was very hard, and were it not for some cash received from the NSW Government, and some money I made from carving pipes, I am afraid my position would not have been of much account.'

Trooper G. R. Whittington, and Trooper J. M. Ford, of the New South Wales Lancers, both members of the ill-fated patrol ambushed at Slingsfontein on 16 January, escaped from Waterval on 22 April. Equipped with a map and a small compass, the pair had many narrow escapes before reaching Delagoa Bay in an exhausted condition on 6 May. Travelling mainly by night and only by day when assured of good cover, they eventually boarded a goods train at Waterval Onder. By hiding among bales of wool covered by tarpaulins they managed to complete the journey undetected.

Trooper Whittington said that after the fight near Slingsfontein they were hurried away from the scene, spending the next two nights in laagers being fed well but sleeping under bushes with a tarpaulin for protection. Travelling by bullock wagon, they eventually reached Norval's Pont on the Orange River, thence by train to Bloemfontein to be marched off and lodged in the gaol. Three days later the prisoners found themselves on the train to Pretoria and Waterval.

At first the men expected an early release by the advancing army, but at the end of several months in the camp Whittington and Ford decided to make a break. In the attempt they were joined by a sergeant of the Royal Fusiliers who had previously seen service in India and the Sudan.

Whittington was 31 years of age. He had already seen service in Rhodesia against the Matabele in 1896, and in the campaign in Bechuanaland the following year. Once he had trekked from Johannesburg to Bulawayo, a distance of about 550 miles. At the end of the Matabele war he had opened a hotel and general store 50 miles from Bulawayo which was burnt to the ground by natives. He was one of the party who carried Cecil Rhodes shoulder high in December 1896 when he made a triumphant visit to Kimberley from Cape Town.

The three men prepared for the escape by filling haversacks with bully beef and biscuits. They also managed to get old civilian suits and each man had a quantity of quinine. Ford made a copy of a war map on a scale of 25 miles to the inch of the country they proposed to pass through.

At the end of three weeks careful excavation, the three men hid in a concealed hole in the exercise yard. Inside an opening just large enough for entry they lay side by side in a cramped position with not more than six inches clear above their heads; a mate had carefully covered the opening with boards and sand. The space into which they squeezed was not much more than five feet square by 18 inches deep.

Late in the afternoon the guards emptied the yard to return the prisoners to the small compound, at the same time methodically advancing by

tapping the surface with sticks. In a routine check the hole remained undiscovered. The men spent an agonising time waiting for the pre-arranged signal from their mates. For the all clear 'three G's' were to be sounded on a cornet.

When the signal sounded at 6 o'clock the escapees burst from the dark hole covered in perspiration. Having suffered difficulty in breathing in the confined space they took time to revive by gulping in the cool air. From the direction of the inner compound where the Sunday evening service was in progress, the singing of 'Onward Christian Soldiers' drifted across, while the Crown and Anchor boards and the Housie schools, whose urgent calls of 'Play where you fancy' and 'Who says another card,' wafted to the outer compound. The three lay flat on the ground, brushing the soil from their faces and hair. A guard stopped within 20 yards of them, then moved on.

Sufficiently recovered by 7 o'clock, they moved across towards the wire fence. Within ten minutes they managed to make their way clear, over and through the barbed wire. Four hours later after crossing the railway by eluding sentries who indicated their posts by the light of their fires, the fugitives were 2 miles to the north of the camp. The three of them then passed through a mealie patch, waded through two swamps and a spruit close to a number of farmhouses. The brilliantly lit camp gradually faded further in the distance.

All the following day the three hid in a patch of bushveldt 7 miles beyond the Piennar's River. At night they advanced again through the bush, not resting until daybreak. On the move in the afternoon they were forced to hide in the long grass beside the road after narrowly missing being seen by two farmers. That night several streams were crossed but progress became so slow in rough, stony country that camp was made at midnight.

Because the country continued to be very rough, the three decided to travel by daylight whenever possible. They passed cautiously through a fertile valley lined with farms and kraals by taking cover in clumps of trees dotted fortuitously along the way. When Ford began to show signs of exhaustion, the sergeant and Whittington each took one of his haversacks, thus enabling him to carry on.

Once out of the valley the country became rough again. That night the fugitives lay wearily down to sleep in the shelter of some bushes in a gully. In the early hours of the morning Whittington had to wake Ford, whose coat sleeve had caught alight on the edge of the small fire. They were continually forced to make detours to avoid farms. Once in an open stretch of country they had to seek refuge in the long grass to avoid an African driving cattle.

Soon after this the sergeant decided to take a chance by striking south to

find the railway as soon as possible. He felt they were taking too long to get out of Transvaal. On the other hand the Australians contended that to seek the railway so soon would be altogether too risky. So the rations were divided and the sergeant headed south in the direction of Bronkhorst Spruit. The Australians never saw or heard of their companion again.

On one very cold night Whittington and Ford camped in a kraal. Inside this shelter they built a fire, warming themselves and making tea in a pannikin and munching biscuits. The pair dropped off into a sound sleep but were awakened by Whittington's coat and trousers catching alight. The following day they were in trouble again, first almost being discovered and then being in danger of incineration in a veldt fire lit by a young Boer on horseback burning off the winter grass for stock grazing. The men were forced to take to a spruit to escape the fire.

At the Olifants River precious rations—mainly biscuits—were lost in swimming across, although the haversacks were kept as high to their heads as possible. After following the Middelburg to Lydenburg road for some miles the fugitives struck further south, but numerous farmhouses caused endless detours. In the dark they almost walked into the back of a farmhouse and had to flee in haste from barking watch-dogs, so they sought shelter in a deeply wooded kloof to rest and dry their clothing. Although the place was inhabited by baboons, their frequent barking did not alarm the men until a number of farmers bent on shooting the baboons began to make their way up the kloof. With rifle shots cracking close they quickly broke camp, pushing up towards the top of the kloof. Here they unwittingly moved into a fire rapidly making its way down the slope before a high wind. Badly affected by the smoke and heat, the pair sheltered in the lee of a rock all day.

Once more going forward through broken country they eventually clambered down the side of a rocky kopje, only to find themselves almost on top of a farmhouse and beset by barking dogs. At what seemed a safe distance from the farmhouse they dallied in a patch of ripe water-melons in a mealie field. The fugitives became so absorbed in doing justice to this bounty that they ignored the barking of the approaching dogs until the farmer began to shoot at them. After managing to get away out of the farmer's sights, there was no thought of pulling up for the next few miles. Then Whittington discovered the loss of the haversack containing the tobacco, matches and medicine. It had been left back in the melon patch. For the next night and a day they lay in a hollow on the veldt feeling thoroughly depressed with no shelter from the sun and tormented by swarms of mosquitoes.

On 1 May soaking wet and cold they wandered close to a farmhouse and were delighted to discover that the occupants were native Africans. The

two then approached openly. Claiming to be prospectors they asked the way to Pretoria, by this means checking their exact location. Unfortunately the Africans had no food to spare, so they went away empty-handed. Their problems became worse when the already badly worn shoes began to give out in country that seemed to be a mass of stones.

On 3 May within sight of Waterval Bovan they paused before descending the steep mountain to Waterval Onder. In the comparative safety of cover near the railway station the escapees took stock of their position. Their boots were worn out and their rations almost done.

Having decided to climb aboard a goods train bound for Delagoa Bay, they crept alongside a line of trucks the following morning, hiding among bales of wool marked Delagoa Bay. During the slow journey the trucks were often shunted off the main line, causing long delays. Whittington suffered from an attack of malaria. Nevertheless, when Boer officials searched the trucks at Komati Poort, they remained undiscovered and arrived safely at Lourenco Marques.

After crawling out of the trucks the escaped prisoners headed straight for a place standing on a street corner where the barman refused to accept payment for the beer. Even the ricksha boys declined to carry such an unkempt and destitute looking pair of individuals, so just as they were they walked to the office of the British Consul.

Whittington and Ford were the first prisoners to successfully complete the escape from Waterval to Delagoa Bay. When the war ended Ford returned to Johannesburg as a mining surveyor.

Two other New South Wales men, Trooper W. W. Eames from Rylstone, of the Australian Horse, and Trooper W. F. Bevan serving in the South African Light Horse, were the only escapees from Waterval to make the crossing to the west to Lobatsi near Mafeking, although a number of unsuccessful breaks were attempted. Trooper Ford afterwards wrote to his mother in North Sydney and said that Bevan had originally intended to escape with Whittington and himself to Delagoa Bay. Eames was invalided home and arrived in Sydney on 30 August 1900.

Trooper Bevan had been captured in the battle of Colenso. Soon after recovering from the effects of his ordeal, Bevan went back to Pretoria with the Imperial Light Horse and rejoined his regiment. He afterwards said that if he had known what they were to suffer, he would never have attempted to escape.

Trooper Eames wrote to a friend in Sydney saying that at Waterval 'he had not been badly treated, but the tucker was not good'. So when he received his share from the distribution of the relief money sent by the New South Wales Government amounting to £3 he 'did not trouble to wait for any more, but bought some stuff and left. It is 180 miles to measure it flat to Mafeking.'

On the afternoon of 27 April, Bevan and Eames crept into two empty coffins in the morgue situated in the outer compound. When the rest of the prisoners were safely locked up for the night, the two emerged cautiously and stole silently away to be clear of the fence by 9 o'clock. The story of their escape is best told by Bevan himself.

'We set out on 27 April and made for the north of Mafeking to join the forces there. After the first two nights we got the lay of the stars and had no difficulty. We travelled by day until the eighth night, when we were unable to go any further, and my mate was almost done. Well the heat of the day cooked him altogether.

'We ventured out a little before sunset, and after travelling a little over a mile he collapsed completely. Fortunately we were beside an old track. The poor fellow could hardly speak. I picked up a water bottle and set out for water. It was moonlight and I managed to keep to the track. After travelling 10 miles I came to a creek with a splendid hole of water. I then filled the bottle and started back, but could not keep to the track, for the moon was nearly down. I returned to the creek and at daybreak made a fresh start, getting back at about 9 o'clock.

'He was still in the same place, but very low. Anyway the water brought him round, and I managed to get him to the water that night. We camped on the creek for a couple of days, then made a fresh start. My mate was feeling very dicky, for we had only tinned beef and army biscuits that the Boers commandeered at Dundee, and were feeding us on them. We saved them for the purpose. Next day we were fortunate enough to strike a kaffir kraal, a native village, where we bought a couple of fowls, some milk and corn which we boiled until it was soft. The natives live chiefly on these. This set him up completely, and we started off as good as ever.

'On the 15th night at about 10 o'clock we struck the railway line and found it torn up, which told us plainly that the Boers were still about. Anyway we travelled up the line, and the following morning we arrived at Lobatsi. How I did it I do not know, for the fever broke out on me the day before, and I was completely done. As luck would have it an armoured train came down in the morning and picked us up. I can assure you it was a good send.

'I was sent up to the hospital, and after a couple of days in bed the fever left me. Mafeking in the meantime had been relieved. In a few days when I get strong, I am going down the line to join my corps.'

Apart from the hundreds of young Australians who proceeded to South Africa independently to enlist in Colonial units being formed there and the other big group already in the country when war broke out, the Australian contingents provided a large number of volunteers for many of the units which were formed locally. The members of the Australian contingents had



Eastern Transvaal

volunteered for only 12 months service but many of them took their discharge in South Africa rather than return home. Trooper Albert Fisher of the First Victorian Mounted Infantry Company was one of the latter and by 3 July 1900 we find him serving with the Provisional Mounted Police of the Orange River Colony, terminating his service with that body on 11 November of the same year and the next day beginning a year's service with the South African Constabulary from which he was discharged at Bloemfontein on 25 November 1901. Fisher, a gardener by trade from the then remote Melbourne beach suburb of Cheltenham, obviously preferred the life of a soldier. His papers, now in the Australian War Memorial, show that Gunner Albert Fisher of No. 1 Company, Canterbury Division of the New Zealand Garrison Artillery, had passed all gunnery subjects for the year ending 28 February 1910. Fisher was back in Australia in time to enlist in the AIF on 20 August 1914 and he served throughout the war of 1914-18 in the 4th Light Horse both at Anzac and in Palestine although he was 38 when he enlisted. For the next 40 years Sergeant Albert Fisher became an outstanding figure in the Melbourne Anzac Day march as he always marched in full uniform, emu plumes and all in the front rank of the men of the 4th Light Horse, carrying the regimental banner.

Writing home from Paardeburg Field on 3 July 1900, Fisher said: 'We showed some visitors round last week, one was a Colonel Assistant and a General of the Imperial Yeomanry and Lady Grosvenor and Lady Romilly, Major Webb and Mrs de Bathe. They were very nice people and we had a treat showing them round. Corp. Malcolm has since been made a Sgt, Lady Romilly gave him her Kodak, it is a little beauty. . . Lady Grosvenor gave Campbell a new Mauser revolver and they have promised to send me something from Kimberley so I will have something in memory of their visit — I've already been offered £10 for it before any of us know what it will be but I intend to keep it whatever it may be. . . it is a real wet winter day but not very cold. I hope it stops before morning I've got to ride into Bloemfontein 80 miles no fun if it's raining all the way. We are unearthing all sorts of things, rifles and ammunition, in all the boxes there is generally a few curios. I think it has cost me about one pound to feed me and my horse so you can't say I'm extravagant. . . I would like a walk round the beach, you would be surprised to know how much I miss it. It's a very nice climate but there is nothing to see only the same old kopjes wherever you go about the Orange River Colony but I think it is better up in the Transvaal.'

CHAPTER 13

The raising of the second Australian contingents

In December 1899 the news of the British reverse at Magersfontein stirred the Australian and New Zealand colonies to a fresh pitch of patriotic fervour, with further offers of troops for the front, followed by the immediate acceptance by Great Britain of a second contingent from each colony. In direct contrast to the official attitude at the beginning of the war, when infantry was preferred, with cavalry 'least serviceable',¹ the Imperial Government now expressed a preference for mounted men.

With the experience gained early in the Boer invasions of the Cape Colony and Natal, the value of mounted troops had been fully demonstrated. Moreover, in those first months the Australian troops had well and truly won their spurs, so that Captain W. Holmes could fairly report: 'Whenever there was any scouting to be done or mounted troops of any sort, the Australians were always in requisition, and it was a compliment indeed, that Lord Roberts invariably put our men in the advance guard in the forward movement through both the Orange Free State and the Transvaal.'

¹ Great Britain and Imperial War Office South Africa Papers, 1899-1904: *Correspondence Relating to the Despatch of Colonial Military Contingents to South Africa*. (Library of New South Wales number Q968.)

When the news of the events at Colenso and Stormberg reached the colonies to complete the disasters of 'Black Week', it was suggested that in addition to the enlistment of the second contingent a corps of Bushmen should be raised. In Sydney a firm proposal by prominent citizens to send a force of 500 Bushmen sponsored by public subscription met with instant popular approval. The idea also took root in the other Australian colonies and in New Zealand. It supported the widespread belief that boundary riders, stockmen, kangaroo hunters and drovers, with a background and training in the Australian outback similar to that of the Boers themselves, could match the burghers at their own particular type of irregular warfare.

The second contingents were spearheaded by 'A' Battery, Royal Australian Artillery from New South Wales, comprising 175 officers and men. The Imperial authorities declined an offer of the battery at the outbreak of the war although it was a well-trained, disciplined and permanent unit. It was finally accepted and sailed on 30 December 1899, the only field battery to leave Australia.

In every colony the troops marched to the ships through streets lined with cheering crowds in the same manner as the first contingent. By mid-January most of the 1,500 troops were on the high seas, the last to leave being the West Australians who embarked on 3 February. In addition to 'A' Battery, New South Wales also sent a detachment of Army Medical Corps — 93 men equipped with ambulances, wagons, carts and horses. The force also included a small detachment of reinforcements for the New South Wales Lancers and the Australian Horse. As was the case with the first contingent, the majority of enlistments came from militia regiments. Now that every man was required to be mounted, applications from the mounted regiments were given preference. Not a great deal of instruction was required for these early contingents. The men also signed up for one year's service, although this was often extended. Sometimes the returned men went again with later forces.

Applications for nurses to go with the First Contingent had been turned down but the Imperial authorities agreed to allow not more than 10 nurses to proceed with the Second Contingent. In the end 14 nursing sisters from New South Wales and ten from Victoria were allowed to go. In the earlier months of the war three nurses were also accepted from South Australia. But these ladies were preceded in South Africa by at least one free-lance nurse from New South Wales. By paying her own passage when the initial applications were turned down, Miss Agnes Macready arrived in Durban to take up duties at the Fort Napier military hospital in Pietermaritzburg.

A number of Australian Nursing Sisters in South Africa were awarded the Royal Red Cross, an award founded by Queen Victoria in 1883 for women who nurse the sick and wounded of the armed forces. The Australian

recipients were: Nursing Sisters E. Nixon from New South Wales, M. S. Bidsmead from South Australia, and Nursing Superintendent M. Rawson from Victoria.

Meanwhile the group of influential citizens in New South Wales who signified their intention to form a Bushmen's regiment found themselves supported by a sympathetic Colonial government. When the offer to raise the corps by public subscription was accepted by the Imperial Government, an official committee formed in Sydney met on 4 January. An immediate call for volunteers met with a ready response. The 500 applications required came in from every part of the colony within the space of six days. Within a few weeks the number had trebled.

The raising of the Citizens' Bushmen Corps became the most popular of all the patriotic movements. The greatest difficulty was to reduce the flow of volunteers to the number required. By 11 January so many volunteers were in Sydney from the bush without accommodation that the Government made available a section of the military camp at Randwick for the men, although the outfitting of the second contingent was then very much in progress.

In the other colonies a similar rush to enlist occurred. In South Australia 100 carefully selected men were chosen from 1,200 applicants, to go under Captain S. G. Hubbe. Money donated by companies and individual subscribers raised sufficient funds to pay for the squadron until June 1901.

The applicants were required to pass a physical test before competing for places in the contingent by trials for horsemanship and rifle shooting. Not more than 5 per cent had the benefit of previous military training, but all were good rough riders and good shots. They were as well men who could find their way about by fending for themselves in any open country; the type who could kill, dress or cook their own meat, or knock up a damper with flour and water in the camp fire coals, or boil their own 'billy' of tea. With the completion of the enrolments, the recruits were drilled, clothed and equipped and supplied with horses within a few weeks. In this short space of time the corners were rapidly rubbed off, and enough discipline installed to make something like soldiers of them.

Lance-Corporal M. J. May, a candidate for enlistment in the Bushmen Corps, wrote from the camp at Randwick on 27 January 1900: 'The camp where we are stationed is simply a sand-bed surrounded by rushes and a mixture of various undergrowths. We were shown to our quarters consisting of two large tents, the two taking 50 men. These tents are pitched in sand 6 inches deep — no tables, tin plates and pints. We are supplied with two blankets each, and often wake of a morning to find ourselves lying in sand. We are served with chops for breakfast, and generally a stew for dinner, which at times is often loaded with flies. But when tea time comes our allowance is bread and jam only and often short at that.'

'We have all passed the medical examination which is not very strict. For riding tests which we have also passed we had three jumps consisting of brush about four feet high. A very stiff two-railed fence is fastened in the centre of the brushes some 3 feet 6 inches high. These jumps are erected in a sand bed about a foot deep. We have only the shooting to pass now, to qualify for active service in the Transvaal.'

Public subscriptions poured in rapidly and a committee of Australians resident in London generously supported the fund. Within a few weeks it became evident that the financial aspect was not in any doubt. The British Government offered to send transports. The New South Wales Government undertook the details of shipping the men and the army gave much assistance. Yet the Committee reserved the right of selection as to who should go. When the Bushmen left Sydney the fund was out of debt with no less than £50,000 subscribed, sufficient to equip the force and keep it in the field for six months.

The movement fairly captured the public imagination. The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported: 'This contingent is purely a people's gift to the Queen.' In a similar strain the paper said it was 'a voluntary and personal gift'. Special 'Bushmen' badges were sold and worn by the citizens. A popular song, described as the greatest song of the century, went round the music halls. The New South Wales Cricket Association contributed to the fund with the takings from a specially arranged benefit match at the Sydney Cricket Ground, where the Australian Eleven played against the Rest of Australia. The teams contained such great names as Victor Trumper, Syd Gregory, Joe Darling, Clem Hill and Hugh Trumble.

The Bushmen paraded on the ground, accompanied by military bands, for half an hour during an extended Saturday afternoon tea adjournment with a huge crowd present.

In early February the Bushmen left the camp at the Randwick Rifle Range, moving to the Kensington Racecourse. When there was no racing the public enthusiastically paid sixpence a head for the privilege of seeing the 'Bushies' drilling and training. The proceeds were distributed between the patriotic fund and the Bushmen's Fund.

The Bushmen participated in a special midweek meeting at Randwick Racecourse before a crowd of 5,000 people. The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported: 'Just about one o'clock, a cry of "There they are" directed all eyes to the Kensington side of the course, and from out of a cloud of dust emerged some 300 men mounted on the horses that are to carry them over the veldt. The compact little body moved with beautiful precision and regularity round about seven furlongs of the course, and then swept into the central enclosure. That ended the display.'

In a six-event programme, two races were confined to riders of the Bushmen's contingent. The horses were contingent horses. The riders rode in full

uniform with leggings and forage cap. No colours were worn, only a number on the saddle slip. Both races were won by a gelding named Uproar. With Trooper J. E. Walker in the saddle he defeated the favourite in the 'Our Boys Plate'. In the 'Commander Plate' later in the afternoon Lieutenant William Cope rode Uproar to win a purse of 22 sovereigns.

It is doubtful whether in the streets of Sydney there has ever been seen a parade like that of the khaki-clad Bushmen's Corps. To mark the occasion the Premier, Mr William Lyne, said that the day set down for the departure of the contingent should be observed as a public holiday throughout the colony.

Proudly wearing the letters 'A.B.C.' on their shoulder straps the 'Bushies' left the Kensington camp to march to the transports early on the afternoon of 26 February 1900 with the commanding officer, Lieut-Colonel H. P. Airey, riding in front.

With their entry into the heart of the densely crowded city the outburst from an emotional demonstration turned into a mighty roar, for the enlisting of the Citizens' Bushmen Corps had been an attempt by the people, quite apart from the actions of the Government, to express their loyalty on their own account. Moreover the crowd was buoyant with the news of the surrender of Cronje at Paardeberg.

The holiday crowd lined the streets for almost three miles to greet the 520 officers and men. Within the space of a few weeks events had thrust forward these men from the bush. Some from the far outback had never seen the sea, others perhaps may never before have seen the city. Swiftly they became national heroes. In front of the leading band the regimental mascot, a sheep-dog named Bushie, with Bugler R. de L. Peck in charge, trotted along dressed out with rosettes of red, white and blue. Bushie was officially named and presented to the regiment on behalf of well-wishers by the Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Frederick Darley. Other unofficial pets of the regiment in the parade included a ringtail possum, frequently held aloft, and a terrier dog.

Flowers and confetti floated down on the men as they marched under banners and flags that made the city a blaze of colour. The *Daily Telegraph* reported: 'The Bushmen marched just as a body of irregulars might, throwing out tokens of friendship and shaking hands with hundreds who struggled up to the horses and pulled at the reins, threatening to stop the procession.'

The march became one long procession of cheering people waving handkerchiefs and friends and female admirers calling affectionate farewells. The rollicking Bushmen frequently bent down to bestow kisses on the pretty girls or to receive a gift in a bottle. Then the hastily emptied bottles were sometimes carried high as trophies. Others happily accepted and munched fruit and sweets. Dense crowds blocked the roads and mounted police had frequently to clear a passage for the marchers.

From the fine residential buildings in Macquarie Street the most fashionably dressed ladies lined the balconies and verandahs to watch the spectacle. As the troops passed Parliament House, the Mint and Sydney Hospital the spectators choked every verandah and street space. The deafening cheers continually frightened the much decorated Bushie, so that his bugler master could scarcely hold him in. The troops formed up at the Woolloomooloo wharf while the Lieutenant-Governor, the Premier, and the Minister for Defence made farewell speeches.

From the transports the 'Bushies' sang, cheered and waved hats and handkerchiefs from the upper decks, even from the rigging ladders and the mast ropes. Two other mascots appeared on the decks in the form of a wallaby and a full-blooded dingo. Owing to the weather outside, the transports did not sail until the next morning, and small craft remained busy all day taking sightseers to where the ships lay in the harbour.

In Brisbane where the Bushmen movement did not get under way in the same manner as in the southern Colonies, the Third Queensland Mounted Infantry embarked on 3 March. The Premier, Mr Robert Philp, remained on board ship overnight to check and superintend the settling down of the troops. In Western Australia the Bushmen were given a banquet at Government House. In Hobart, after the farewell dinner for the Tasmanian Bushmen, the waitresses draped themselves in red, white and blue and marched two abreast ahead of the troops to form a guard of honour on the pier.

With the 1,100 men of the Citizens' Bushmen Corps already embarked or about to embark from the different Australian ports, the Premier of New South Wales revealed on 3 March the contents of a cable received from the Colonial Office in London. Mr Joseph Chamberlain, the Colonial Secretary, was asking for a further 2,000 men of the same class as the Bushmen for general service anywhere in South Africa. The British Government undertook to bear all the cost of sending the force, which was to be known as the Imperial Bushmen.

While the Premiers met to agree on quotas from the Colonies, the enrolling of more volunteers began throughout the land. In this way the several Imperial Bushmen Corps came into being. No difficulty was found in finding the men, for no less than four or five times the number required rushed to enlist. The first detachments sailed in April. By the middle of May the first complete Imperial Bushmen Corps had left for the front.

The transports with the Citizens' Bushmen on board arrived in Cape Town early in April, but to everyone's surprise instead of disembarking they were immediately ordered to the port of Beira in East Africa. By the invoking of a secret treaty with Portugal, the British gained the right to send troops and war equipment through the Portuguese territory to Rhodesia. During the voyage along the coast the firemen on the *Atlantian* went on strike and were put in irons. From then on volunteer Bushmen fired the boilers.

The Transvaal Boers had long been concerned at the occupation and control of the territory north of the Limpopo River by Cecil Rhodes and his Chartered Company. By doing so Rhodes stopped any ideas of expansion northward they may have had. Paul Kruger expressed a sense of frustration when he complained of being 'shut up in a kraal'.

The Bushmen force, with a battery of the Royal Canadian Artillery, became the vanguard of Lieut-General Sir Frederick Carrington's Rhodesian Field Force. Close behind came the Imperial Yeomanry, a volunteer citizen force raised in Britain, and the Imperial Bushmen. The objective was to provide assistance for the relief of Mafeking, while at the same time preventing any attempt made by the Boers to trek into Rhodesia. Finally, they expected to enter the Transvaal from the north and from the west.

The Portuguese administration in Beira welcomed the force with a reception and garden party for the officers, followed by a ball that night. The functions were attended by the Australian nursing sisters. A Victorian, Nursing Sister Isobel Ivey, wrote: 'We went to Government House to a tennis party, afternoon tea and a ball at night.'

The Bushmen found Beira a fairly new town with buildings constructed generally of corrugated iron. Most of the streets were lined with Australian gum trees. In a little more than a week the men built a camp on low-lying ground outside the town. The site was two miles out in an area which in the wet season was nothing better than a swamp. Before long the 'Bushies' discovered the nature of the moisture not far below the surface. When sticks were pushed down the crab holes, they came up coated with thick slime. Heat, flies and mosquitoes added to the unhealthy nature of the site. Despite the precaution taken of boiling all drinking water, the men began to go down with dysentery and malaria. The Australians and New Zealanders visited the town at night with or without leave, frequenting the bars where they often took over with rollicking impromptu concerts.

A light railway to Rhodesia ran from Beira to Marandellas, a distance of 382 miles along a single narrow line with one section of only 2 foot 6 inch gauge. As the whole stretch of the line was served by only six locomotives, all normal traffic ceased for the convenience of the troop movements. The transit of troops, stores, guns and horses resulted in endless hours of confusion and congestion. In the weeks ahead, no less than 5,000 men and 6 gun batteries passed through from Beira.

Nursing Sister Ivey described the journey by rail to Marandellas: 'We left Beira with all its dirt, heat and beauty on Saturday 21 April for Bamboo Creek 56 miles distant. Departing from Beira at 7.15 a.m. the train reached Bamboo Creek by 7 p.m. We had dinner at the Creek. The same night, or morning rather, the train left at 2 a.m. It took from 7.15 a.m. on Saturday until 7 p.m. on Tuesday to travel 382 miles to Marandellas.'

The leading detachment of Bushmen arrived at an intermediate camp at Bamboo Creek on 20 April. Bamboo Creek, a fever-ridden place in Portuguese territory lying not very much above sea level, was only 56 miles from Beira. Yet the journey by troop train took 12 hours. From there on the railway climbed upward to Marandellas, rising to 5,000 feet above sea level through some luxuriant and wild country. Thick bushy vegetation constantly brushed the line, as monkeys and buck dashed away from the locomotive and hippopotamuses lay placidly in nearby swamps.

Stops for water and for supplies of wood left stacked along the railway track were many and frequent. The men travelled sitting on the hardwood floor of open trucks, sometimes covered by tarpaulins. The firewood used, an indifferent kind of redwood, caused great showers of sparks to cascade from the engine. In the trucks the sparks sometimes burnt the men's uniforms and stoppages were frequent. On one steep grade the New South Wales men had to get out and push, while Africans in front hauled on a long rope. Often the troops had to turn out at night and walk, to enable the engine to climb a steep grade.

Lance-Corporal O. F. M. Middleton, 'A' Squadron, New South Wales Citizens' Bushmen, said the train travelled at a pace of about 10 miles an hour: 'We frequently stopped to get up steam and we used to get out and explore the jungle, and obtain flowers and fruit. When we got to the border of Rhodesia, we were met by a few English ladies and gentlemen. They had hot tea for us, and presented every man with cigarettes and a box of matches. We had a great time on the train, three days and three nights. There were 40 men in each truck, a common coal truck with a top to keep the sun off, and only one blanket to each man. You can imagine what it was like lying on the floor with only one blanket for three days and nights. My bones were aching all over when we reached camp.'

The crew of one train had so much difficulty with a defective engine that Sergeant Herbert Brent, a Victorian with some experience of locomotives, offered to try and drive the ailing engine. After some hours effort, during which Brent failed to make much better progress, an engine following up crashed into the labouring train. The momentum threw Brent out of the driver's cabin on to the rails killing him instantly. Captain J. de B. Griffith of the Victorian Medical Staff who had been sitting in a truck on a pile of cases escaped serious injury, although he also was thrown on to the rails.

On reaching the highlands the country consisted of wide grassy veldt, with stunted trees and patches of curious rock formations. At Marandellas where the railway terminated, the Bushmen were stationed at a base camp still in the course of construction. Here they pitched tents and cleared the scrub in order to extend the area, and dug small dams. Mashona tribesmen, both men and women, were employed to construct permanent native-type huts of wattle and red mud with thatched roofs and large enough to house 15 men.

After a bad time on the railway, travelling four together in open trucks, the horses then began to succumb to a disease known as Blue Tongue for which there was no cure. The men also were suffering from malaria contracted in the lowlands, which put a lot of them down for treatment in a British Field Hospital.

On 5 May General Carrington detailed a squadron of Queensland Mounted Infantry, under Captain C. W. Kellie, to escort the Canadian Artillery, then about to set out to join Lieut-Colonel H. C. O. Plumer's force in the relief of Mafeking. Because no horses were available for the first leg of the trip to Bulawayo, stage-coaches drawn by mules were used. Relays of fresh mules were provided every 12 to 14 miles. Over the last 30 miles the mules were replaced by bullocks. In this curious way the escort for the guns, piled up inside and sitting on top of the coaches, arrived in Bulawayo after a journey of 280 miles.

'A' Squadron of the New South Wales Citizens' Bushmen, under Colonel Airey, was the next to leave fully mounted and in full marching order. Before their departure General Sir Frederick Carrington addressed the squadron, describing them as the vanguard of the Rhodesian Field Force. The squadron escorted a convoy of 16 bullock wagons. All trekking had to take place at night, to enable the animals to graze by day.

Lance-Corporal David Lees, serving with 'A' Squadron, wrote from Marandellas on 2 May: 'There are 100 men and horses starting for Bulawayo tomorrow morning. It is about 280 miles from here. As far as I know we are going to take the train on our arrival and proceed straight to Mafeking. The whole of the men are not here yet, and we are going as an advance guard. There are some of the Canadian contingent going with us, and half a dozen field guns. The Canadians are a fine lot of fellows, and their horses, of a much better stamp than ours, arrived in much better condition.'

'Our stay has proved disastrous to our horses as we have lost about 30, and down the line at Bamboo Creek they have lost about forty with the disease. If we do not start at once we shall have none left as I suppose a great many will die on the road. We will have to foot it, but suppose others will be found for us. I am sorry to say that a number of our fellows are now down in the hospital with fever which is common to this part.'

Whenever horses became available the Australians continued to leave Marandellas in small detachments. By now thoroughly fed up with the delays, the men would have willingly walked to Bulawayo so eager were they to get ready to move south to take part in the relief of Mafeking. In fact one detachment, 'B' Squadron of the New South Wales Citizens' Bushmen, led by Lieutenant T. J. Lynch, actually walked the 280 miles carrying rifles and ammunition with some kit. After 20 days on the road, walking from spruit to spruit and camping on the open veldt, they reached Bulawayo in a worn-out condition with sore and bleeding feet.

By the middle of June 5,000 men of the Rhodesian Field Force were strung out along 1,100 miles between the port at Beira to beyond Bulawayo, where the spearhead of the force had gone on towards Mafeking. The Imperial Bushmen were among the troops in the port, temporarily held up on the transports because of the inadequate transport facilities along the route. Nevertheless, their presence was a deterrent to the likelihood of a Boer commando crossing into Rhodesia.

By 12 June all the Australian Bushmen had reached Bulawayo or beyond. The Second Bushmen Contingent known as the Imperial Bushmen, together with the New Zealand Bushmen, had all reached Bulawayo by 4 July. Three squadrons of Victorian Bushmen arrived with the Imperial Yeomanry at the beginning of September. By this time malaria had caused many casualties. By June no less than half of the Yeomanry had fallen with the sickness.

The *Sydney Daily Telegraph* correspondent reported from Bulawayo on 14 June: 'There is a question which vexes the soul of the Bushmen in Rhodesia; a question that forms the sole topic of conversation by day, and disturbs their sleep of nights; a question that will be answered before these lines are read in Sydney. Will there be any fighting in Rhodesia? Shall we be in it? Pretoria has been occupied and the war is within measurable distance of being finished, and so far there has been nothing to show that the Rhodesian Field Force is going to get a look in.

'In some quarters it is believed that the war is by no means over, and that if Sir Frederick Carrington moves his men south to the Transvaal, the Bushman will come to his own, which is good cover and steady shooting.

'As an Englishman I have derived much pleasure from the study of the Bushman, and after two months acquaintance I have come to the conclusion that he is one of the best fellows in the world—and this after he has laughed me to scorn for drinking tea with milk, and has been unsympathetically mirthful over my ineffectual effort to make "damper" or the tasty "devils in the coals".'

'He is a tall rawboned, good-natured beggar. He can make tea in a period an ordinary man can be striking a match; he can ride horses that tie themselves into knots, and buck with great suddenness and power; he can swear so that I have seen regular Tommies stand and gape in awesome admiration. With a sick comrade he is as tender as a child; he is the sort of stuff that heroes are cut from, and when a buck crosses his path within eyeshot, he fears not God or the game laws.'

Corporal Wallace Ryrie summed up the highlight of his experience in Rhodesia briefly: 'Some of us have put in a fairly rough time. Most of our horses died and I was one of the party that had to do a forced march on foot from Marandellas to Bulawayo—three hundred miles, carrying about

35 pounds, including rifle, ammo, blanket, overcoat and tucker. I have hardly had a square meal since leaving Sydney.'

Meanwhile the Third Queensland Mounted Infantry, spearheading the Rhodesian Force by escorting the Canadian Artillery, left Bulawayo the day after their arrival, travelling with the Canadians by train 460 miles to a point about four miles north of Mafeking where the Boers had torn up the line. Still without horses they trudged 40 miles on foot to join Plumer's column by daybreak on 14 May 1900, at the end of a night march.



CHAPTER 14

The Bushmen enter the western Transvaal

Colonel Plumer operated in flat open country with a force 1,000 strong but with an effective strength of not more than 600 as malaria and enteric fever had cut down the others, many of whom were in hospital at Bulawayo. Another 10 per cent were dismounted because of the mortality among the horses. For supplies the column depended on the port at Beira, over 1,100 miles away. With the exception of a few regular officers, the column was comprised entirely of ex-civilians. In armament as well as numbers the column was inferior to the commandos within the north-western area, as the guns numbered only a few old 7-pounders firing black powder.

Plumer's main objective was to hold the frontier to Rhodesia from Bechuanaland. Nevertheless, by a policy of making short sorties and by skirmishing on the flanks and rear of the Boer force, he succeeded to the degree hoped for in diverting the energies of the enemy surrounding Mafeking.

Mafeking, the most northern of all the Cape Colony towns, lay beyond Kimberley on the railway going north to Bulawayo. It rested in open country, not more than 8 miles from the Transvaal border. A modest market town with unpretentious galvanised roofed buildings, it was well

stocked with food and forage supplies. It also had important railway workshops. Trooper J. King, an Australian serving with the garrison, compared Mafeking with his own little country town in New South Wales. 'It was,' he said, 'a little shanty town about twice the size of Jamberoo.'

When hostilities began the Boers under General Cronje cut all the lines of communication and surrounded Mafeking with a force of 10,000 burghers. In the beginning Lieut-Colonel R. S. Baden-Powell commanded a garrison of about 800 locally trained volunteers. These were later augmented by the wartime enlistment of every able-bodied man in the town area, bringing the total up to 1,200 men.

Baden-Powell spread the small garrison over a wide perimeter in which there were few natural features that could be used for the defence. On the other hand the enemy, as was their way, proved themselves unwilling to risk an all-out assault across open ground. Baden-Powell had trenches dug around the perimeter, and built barricades in the town. Bomb-proof shelters were excavated in the form of trenches, often 10 feet deep, and covered with iron or wooden rails with six feet of earth on top.

The Boers sent shells over daily except Sunday, even bringing up a Creusot gun firing a 94-pound shell. Trooper King commented: 'On Sunday we always kept up with sports of all sorts, as it was the only day that the people could get out of their dugouts, and we often thanked Cronje for the Sunday's rest, as it saved the lives of the garrison.'

Although lacking in anything that could match the enemy artillery, the besieged, by making raids on enemy positions, usually showed more aggression than the Boers. After an unsuccessful raid Trooper King reported: 'On 26 December we marched two miles to take one of their forts in a night attack, and after shelling with our seven-pounders we charged. They let us get within 300 yards, and of 70 men who went up only two returned unwounded.'

On 12 May the Boers succeeded for the first time in getting within the lines of defence when Field-Cornet Eloff, a grandson of Paul Kruger, acted under instructions from the President that Mafeking must be taken. Eloff attacked along the river bed with the Marico and Rustenburg burghers, passing through a native village and setting fire to the grass huts. The raiders then rushed a stone building being used as a police barracks, but occupied on this morning by Lieut-Colonel C. O. Hore and about 17 men. Hore surrendered at 6 a.m. Soon afterwards Baden-Powell's Protectorate Regiment encircled the stone barracks and captured Eloff together with 97 other prisoners, at the same time releasing Colonel Hore and his men.

Seven hours after the Queenslanders and Canadians joined Plumer's force, the column marched to a point 20 miles west of Mafeking to join forces with a flying column from Kimberley led by Colonel B. T. Mahon. This

special column was made up of 440 Imperial Light Horsemen, 460 irregular Kimberley Mounted Corps, a battery of Royal Horse Artillery and Maxim guns. With the wagons marched 100 infantrymen. They were in four lots of 25 men each, selected from English, Welsh, Irish and Scottish regiments.

On 17 May the relief column met and defeated the Boers after an action lasting four hours in scrubby country near the Molopo River, north-west of Mafeking. Being posted in the rear to protect the wagons the infantry and the Queensland Mounted Infantry took no part in the action until late in the day when the infantry was called up to clear the trenches near a farmhouse with a bayonet charge.

The infantry, veterans of the Tugela and Ladysmith campaigns, went in to attack by alternately rushing forward and going to ground. When only 400 yards remained they rose once again in extended order to complete the task. Seeing this the Queenslanders, chafing under orders that held them in the rear and the likelihood of missing out in the action altogether, bounded forward. Showing scant regard for cover they ran yelling and cheering until they found themselves running stride for stride with the British infantry over the last part of those 400 yards.

Trooper Norman Cowley described the feelings of a Queenslander coming under fire for the first time: 'It is quite a novel sensation when you hear a shell come screaming overhead; and when it bursts, a cloud of dust, bits of iron and shrapnel come whizzing past your ears. The Boers had evidently got the range and seemed to have a special set on our convoy of wagons and ambulance. Several shells burst within a few yards of the latter.'

'I saw a shell burst under a bullock, and it blew him clean in half. Just when we were ordered to lie down, I said to the man next to me: "Are you lucky? If not I will shift." It was funny to see the fellows duck when a shell came along, but they did not seem to mind the Mauser bullets. It was the pom-pom which made us think of home and mother.'

By 7 o'clock that night the column bivouacked seven miles from the town. Imperial Light Horseman Corporal Ernest Warby, formerly of Sydney, wrote his account of the relief of Mafeking: 'Long before this letter reaches you the world will have known that Mafeking has been relieved. The ILH were to the fore again. We are a lucky lot to get so much fighting and consider ourselves highly honoured through being picked out of so many regiments to go and help in the relief of the brave little town.'

'We marched from Ladysmith to Mooi River, trained to Durban, thence to Cape Town by steamer; by train to Kimberley and from there we marched 223 miles to Mafeking. We made a record march, horses and men being on half rations.'

'On Sunday 13 May we had a fight with the Boers. They tackled us in some thick scrub. When the fight started we were only 200 yards apart.'

In many cases the horses were shot over, and again I lost a couple of chums. Luckily neither myself nor my horse got a scratch. How we escaped I cannot tell, as our squadron was leading when the fight began, and lost the bulk of 22 men killed and wounded. After two hours fighting the Boers cleared for all they were worth. It was then very dark, so we camped till daylight.

'At about 1 p.m. on 16 May the first shot was fired for the relief of Mafeking. At dusk we had the Boers beaten. Then our Major Karri Davies called for volunteers to ride with him to the town, a distance of about five miles. You can bet I was in that lot. We galloped all the way, striking across country. We could hear the Boers racing about in all directions, and calling to each other, but we were not noticed. The first challenge we got was by a good old English voice: "Halt who goes there." We yelled out: "The Imperial Light Horse."

'It was a Mafeking picket stationed outside the town. It was a grand meeting. We were nearly pulled off our horses. The cheering was heard from the town, and soon we were met by men galloping out to learn what was up. When we got to headquarters the crowd swarmed round us, everyone wanting to shake hands with us at once. Then they struck up 'Rule Britannia' and the National Anthem. After the excitement had died down, two of us answered the call for volunteers to ride back to camp and let them know we had got through safely. We got two fresh horses and after having a cup of hot coffee and a ship's biscuit, being the first mouthful we had touched that day, we started back.

'We had a narrow squeak or two on the way but we got through, and after we had reported the whole column started forward, and we landed into the town at 3 a.m. on 17 May. At daybreak we finished the job by shelling the enemy out of their main camp, capturing a number of their wagons and one nine-pounder gun. Our horses were knocked up, so we could not follow up our victory.'

The Boer cause benefited very little from the seven months siege, with its effect of concentrating thousands of burghers away from the main fronts in the critical months of the war. In Britain the lifting of the protracted siege was hailed by joyful demonstrations.

Australia received the news with equal enthusiasm. In the larger cities of Sydney and Melbourne the public demonstrations carried on for over a week. On 'Mafeking Day', the day specially set aside for public and national thanksgiving, special services were held in the churches. It was also a day for patriotic speeches and military parades accompanied by bands, 21-gun salutes and the wearing of the red, white and blue. In Sydney the holiday crowds thronged to the harbour foreshores at night for the excitement of a spectacular fireworks display, with illuminated warships lying at anchor in the background.

The Premier of Queensland received from Baden-Powell a telegram message dated 17 May sent by runner to Kimberley: 'Mafeking relieved today. Am most grateful for invaluable assistance by Queenslanders under [Captain] Kellie, who made record march through Rhodesia to help us.'¹

A number of Australians wrote letters home in which are recorded their experiences during and immediately after the siege. Before the war began Mr Burnet Adams, an Australian surveyor, resided in Klerksdorp, a Transvaal town. Both he and his wife took refuge in Mafeking. On 6 April 1900 Mr Adams wrote: 'We have been besieged for just six months. For the first two months I was in the trenches. Then I was offered the position of engineering assistant to the base commandant, so have had much better times of it, although perhaps more exposed to the enemy's fire.

'Of course we all had some wonderful escapes, principally from shells. One burst in our bedroom, completely wrecking the room and the two adjoining ones. Afterwards we took a cottage; the first morning whilst we were at breakfast a shell burst on the front verandah and passed right through the house, only a few feet from where we were sitting. A week later one passed through the same holes, adding a few more to the breaches in the walls, but this time we were on our guard, and got into a small trench I had made at the back of the house, covered with railway sleepers and earth. A few days ago a splinter from a bullet hit my hand, leaving only a faint scratch, but stinging like a bee. Two other pieces hit me on the thigh.

'The constant moving of earth for our defence works, which we have been gradually moving out in the past three months, brought on an attack of malaria and I spent three weeks in hospital. The Boers can never take Mafeking, and we have provisions enough to last for many months yet. The Boer may have shown bravery in other places, but I don't think much of him or his shooting here.'

On 25 May Mr Adams wrote: 'I am glad to say the siege is over and we have come out of it safely. The constant shelling was awfully rough on the nerves. As far as I can hear from Klerksdorp our house has been smashed up and everything looted by the Boers. Of course I do not know for certain what damage is done as Klerksdorp is still in Boer hands, but I have had conversations with some of the Boer prisoners here. We have nearly 200 men, and they all tell the same tale, all the English houses wrecked. But one of the Boer nurses whom we took prisoner when we took the Big Saayer outside the town, says she thinks our house is still whole and she is a Klerksdorp girl, but has not been home there for seven months.'

On 11 June from the pen of Mrs Adams: 'On Boxing Day after our unsuccessful attack on the Boer Fort "Game Tree" my sister and I went up to the hospital to help nurse the wounded. We lost over 50 killed and

¹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 May 1900.

wounded that day. It was awfully trying. I was holding legs and arms etc., while the doctors were dressing the wounds; some very serious. The first five days were very trying, men dying every day from their wounds and others in great pain, but of course when they became convalescent it was different. One never knew when the stretchers would come up bringing perhaps someone we knew.'

Trooper King wrote to the Mayor of Jamberoo: 'I am still alive, although partly crippled by a bullet in the knee. I was wounded severely on 26 December 1899 in a sortie we made that day, and I have been in the hospital ever since. As you are aware on 9 October 1899 Oom Paul sent his ultimatum to the British requesting them to withdraw their troops from the border, or he would declare war on us. The garrison consisted of about 1,100 men all told—the Protectorate Regiment to which I belong, British South African Police, Bechuanaland Rifles, railway employees and Town Guard, so you see we bluffed old Cronje nicely.'

Trooper King also referred to Colonel Baden-Powell, who by this time had become a public hero throughout the length and breadth of the British Empire: 'Colonel Baden-Powell is one of the coolest hands I ever met. If you were on Cossack post at night, he would come wandering along at any hour, sometimes from the direction of the Boer lines, where he had been doing some scouting on his own account. All the weapons he would have on him would be a stick and a revolver. Whatever sleep he got in the daytime did him, for he never closed his eyes at night during the whole siege.'

On 8 July 1900 Captain Griffiths, Medical Officer with the Victorian contingent, wrote from Mafeking: 'We arrived here a few days ago, from Bulawayo 500 miles by rail, and I am established as surgeon to an isolation hospital for treating an epidemic of measles which has occurred in bad form amongst the troops here and is affecting our corps to a considerable extent. Some of the 1st Brigade of Australian troops from Bulawayo has gone to Zeerust, 43 miles away, but I am content to remain a little longer in this historic town, and on classic ground.'

'The place is full of interest. The effects of the siege and particularly the shelling are plainly visible on all sides, but not to the extent one would suppose when it is stated that 400 90-pounder shells were fired into the town. In the room where I am writing there is a large hole in the back wall through which a shot came and the bar was wrecked by a 90-pounder shell exploding in it. I have a large piece of this shell as a trophy, but fear it is too heavy to carry far. This hotel was Baden-Powell's headquarters, and here on the roof was his lookout. So the Boers paid this building particular attention.'

Finally there is the testimony of G. A. Chadwick, a Quartermaster-Sergeant with the Victorian Bushmen, who wrote that Mafeking 'is very

much like a little country town on the plains of Victoria. I went in to one shop to have a shave yesterday by a man who had fought through the siege, and he got so excited in talking about it, that he took off a piece of my lip, and so I changed the conversation to save my throat.'

Most of the Bushmen were still in Bulawayo when they heard of the relief of Mafeking, although the New South Wales 'A' Squadron narrowly missed taking part in the action. Thus the Queenslanders stole a march on the other Australians, just as they had done earlier at Sunnyside on New Year's Day. The raising of the siege enabled the release of great quantities of stores of food held in the town, much of which was sent to supplement the rather thin supplies at Bulawayo.

With sickness taking its toll of the Bushmen in Bulawayo, the Victorian nursing sisters established an Australian hospital in the pavilion at the recreation ground. Sister Ellen Walter wrote on 15 July: 'We started the hospital here for the troops, and it has been a great business getting things fixed. It is just a large room in the athletic sports ground, formerly used for a gymnasium and which we use as a ward. The grandstand is boarded up for the doctors and for our rooms—all wood and iron—hot in the day and cold at night. Sister Julia Anderson and I are doing all the nursing work at present, as it takes Sister Marianne Rawson all her time looking after the housekeeping. Sisters Diana Tiddy and Annie Thomson are still at the civil hospital here, as there are a few men there still.'

'Each intake of men who arrived in camp had such a lot ill with fever, dysentery and pneumonia. So far no typhoid among our men. We now have 30 in the ward, and 11 in tents with measles, and such a lot of New Zealanders arrive with it. Four nurses are still at Umtali and will come on here later, as the base hospital is to be here. Sister Frances Hines is at Enkeldoorn, but we expect her here soon. She has been a long time alone there. We are anxious to go with the troops, and the Colonel in command has promised to send some of us on when the Imperial contingents have passed.'

The Victorian nurses suffered a fatality when Sister Frances Hines contracted pneumonia. She was buried at Bulawayo with full military honours.

Captain W. W. Dobbin, a Victorian Bushman, wrote: 'You have no doubt heard of all the misfortunes, disease and discomfort encountered by the troops unfortunate enough to be sent to Beira, Marandellas, etc. Our nursing sisters were the only sisters who ventured into these districts, and they have indeed done more than their share of work. At times one, sometimes two, would be trekked off on a week's coaching journey to some fever bed where the troops are falling ill, with possibly no accommodation but a deserted public house. I have seen two sisters on their knees scrubbing and cleaning such a place to receive their patients, and in the middle of

their work 10 or 12 sick and dying men dumped down from an ox wagon, and no orderlies detailed and no native servants.

'The nurses would be obliged to take off some of their own clothing to make pillows for sick men, and then go outside to cook food under a blazing sun. They were never with us after Beira, but some of our troops, and men from other contingents write and speak in most grateful terms of their willing services.'

The combined forces of Plumer and Baden-Powell were not long in crossing into the Transvaal near the village of Ottoshoop, and advancing from there to the town of Zeerust. Trooper T. E. Woods, 'A' Squadron, New South Wales Bushmen, described the surrender of Zeerust: 'When Colonel Plumer's force arrived here, comprising "A" Squadron under Colonel Airey, the Canadian artillery, and Queensland Mounted Infantry fresh from the glory of the relief of Mafeking, there were some 2,000 men all told; the Landrost, or chief magistrate, refused to surrender to Colonel Plumer, so he gave the order: "Prepare for action."

'The Royal Canadian Artillery trained their guns on the gaol, post office, government stores, and courthouse. The remainder of the troops took up positions in the surrounding hills. When the Boers saw this, white flags went up all over the place, and the Landrost rode up the kopje where our camp is at present, and surrendered the town and gave up the keys. All arms were commandeered and guards placed over the buildings.'

Taking a column in which the Bushmen were in considerable numbers, Baden-Powell ranged rapidly over the western Transvaal as far as Rustenburg. Except for a skirmish near the Elands River drifts, he met with little opposition. At about this time Lord Roberts was entering Pretoria. East of Zeerust through the Marico district, one of the most fertile areas in South Africa, squadrons of Bushmen and Yeomen swept over the veldt collecting thousands of rifles and ammunition from a countryside in which there were many more burghers than soldiers. For with the news of the fall of Pretoria the burghers were willing to lay down their arms, take the oath of neutrality, and return to the farms. On 14 June Baden-Powell entered Rustenburg, an important town in the district where the Kruger family farmed. He met with no opposition although Piet Kruger, a son of the President, tried hard to raise a commando, without success.

For the next month everything remained peaceful in the area held by Baden-Powell. Stationing himself at Rustenburg, he left garrisons at Mafeking, the village of Ottoshoop, Zeerust and Lichtenburg—all linked by a system of convoys using the full length of the Mafeking to Rustenburg road. For the benefit of the convoys staging posts were established along the road; there was one at Elands River. Altogether about 2,000 men were spread over several hundred miles.

After the battle of Diamond Hill, Botha sent General Lemmer on a mission to persuade the burghers in the districts of Lichtenburg and Rustenburg once more to leave the farms and return to the commandos. While the area remained so calm and unaware of the projected turn of events, Roberts believed that pacification of the burghers had been successfully carried out. At the very time of Lemmer's arrival in the environs of the Magaliesberg Range near Rustenburg, Roberts prepared to bring Baden-Powell closer to Pretoria by withdrawing him to the Magaliesberg at Commando Nek, leaving only a token force at Rustenburg.

On 3 July at 8 p.m. a party of 82 New South Wales Bushmen, led by Colonel Airey, left Rustenburg for Zeerust with a convoy of 40 wagons, travelling by way of Magato Nek and Elands River to the staging camp at Marico River. Lemmer, employing a small commando of Rustenburgers, seized the opportunity to attack the garrison of 60 men left in the town.

At Marico River on 6 July an urgent message for assistance came through from Major Tracy at Rustenburg. 'B', 'C', and 'D' Squadrons of the New South Wales Citizens' Bushmen were detailed to make a forced relief march. Many of the men were those who had so recently ridden in from Rustenburg. Armed with a 12-pounder and a Maxim gun and accompanied by an ambulance wagon, the column arrived at Elands River Post. Pausing only for a short rest before riding on through the night the column reached Magato Nek at dawn on Saturday 7 July. Finding no enemy at the Nek, Lieutenant H. B. Christie and 20 men were left to guard the position.

Pressing forward the column arrived within the sound of gunfire from Rustenburg, where the Union Jack had been torn down from the Landrost's office and the garrison were holding out in the gaol. Approaching the town in extended order the Australians rode across an open plain at a trot for about 2 miles. Nearing the enemy the pace quickened as the Bushies came under fire from burghers entrenched on the plain.

Overcoming the opposition the Bushmen rode on through the town. Dismounting they left the horses under the slope of a rise beyond the town. The Boers had got on to a kopje. The Bushmen charged up the slope to the foot of the kopje, taking cover behind the big stones. At the end of two hours the burghers were forced to give up their positions. Lemmer's attempt to take the town had failed.

Sergeant H. G. Airey with two men of his own 'D' Squadron, Troopers Thomas Allison and Duncan Sinclair, went to the assistance of a wounded Maxim gunner. Together they worked while under fire to make a stretcher by lashing rifles together and brought the wounded man to safety. Sergeant Airey was commissioned in the field.

The general orders issued by Baden-Powell on 9 July said: 'The General Officer Commanding desires to thank Colonel [H. P.] Airey on the prompt and efficient measures taken by him to maintain Her Majesty's supremacy

in Rustenburg, at a critical time, and the Australian Squadron, C.B.C., for the dash and gallantry with which they made the affair a brilliant success.²

Trooper E. P. Hickey gave this account: 'We were only just in time, or it would have been all up with this town. The Boers had pulled the British flag down and had hoisted theirs, but it did not take us long before we had ours flying again. Previous to the fight we had been in the saddle 48 hours (a forced march) with no scoff (food) but that did not prevent us making a name for the Bushies. We charged brilliantly across a plain for a mile and a half, with the bullets whistling around us. We galloped right through the Boer trenches and back again. The fight lasted between one and a half and two hours, and we had two killed and three wounded.

'We were all pretty sick of the business before we fell in with the Boers and "had a go" at them; but now we are alive again and eager for plenty more fighting. I have nothing of importance to tell you of the trip further back, except that it was pretty rough. I had a week with fever at Marandellas, but am in tip-top health again.'

Trooper W. J. Watson, 'C' Squadron said: 'I suppose you have heard ere this that we received our baptism of fire. I came through it safely, though how I did was really marvellous as my horse was shot from under me, and poor Gilbert Legh was shot through the side. The bullet went right through his bandolier into his stomach and turned and came out again over his hip. Poor old fellow, he stood it like a Briton. All he said was, "My word Watty it hurts." The doctor said that if the bullet had not turned it would have killed him. I am glad to say he is out of danger now, although he will never be able to take the field again. [He was invalided to England on 14 November 1900.]

'Our Captain Tom Machattie was shot through the muscles of one arm. Two of the "B" Squadron men were shot dead. It's a wonder our troop was not shot to pieces, as we rode right into an ambush; Frank King and myself being about 50 yards in front of the Boer trenches when they opened fire on us. We planted the English flag in Rustenburg, so even if we get no more fighting, the people in Sydney cannot throw stones at us.'

Baden-Powell returned to Rustenburg but, as a result of the general flare-up throughout the west, the town soon lost direct contact with Pretoria when Lemmer occupied Olifants Nek. When De la Rey and his commando joined Lemmer, the situation at Rustenburg looked serious for Baden-Powell until a large force under Methuen dispersed the commandos on 18 July 1900. In a clash near the Nek Lieutenant Christie, 'C' Squadron, went back under fire to rescue a man whose horse had been shot.

By this time, the whole of the western Transvaal, stirred by special organisers and with the support of commandos from the east, began to rise from its complete state of collapse. Before long 90 per cent of those under the oath of neutrality left the farms to take up arms again. There were now 7,000 armed burghers in the west between Pretoria and Mafeking. As a result, the supply route set up by Baden-Powell along the road from Zeerust to Rustenburg could no longer be kept open. No supplies could come to Rustenburg through the Elands River Post as General Lemmer held the road near the Koster River, running just to the north but almost parallel to the range called Swartruggens. When the supply problem became serious, Baden-Powell instructed Colonel Airey to 'brush aside' the enemy, and proceed to the Elands River Post and return with a convoy.

Late in the afternoon of 21 July, 300 Australians from New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia started out along the road towards Elands River Post. At dusk the enemy opened fire on the advanced scouts, killing a horse. That night the column camped on a ridge away from the road.

Early next morning the whole force came under fire after burghers on nearby kopjes had allowed the advance and flanking scouts to pass. With the bullets coming thick and fast, the surrounded Australians could do nothing more than fling themselves down in the long grass near the road. The place was entirely free of stones or boulders. Trees and shrubs were few.

Before long the burghers had shot most of the horses. Those that survived were rushed to shelter near the river, or to a nearby farmhouse, but were shot by the enemy who crept up on them to within short range. The Reverend John Boardman, a Church of England padre, said in a report that two troopers acting as horscholders were killed and Trooper William Harris wounded by boys of only 14 to 18 years of age firing from a range of 50 yards.

Without horses the Australians remained pinned down. All day they could do nothing against a force of burghers being steadily built up to 1,000 riflemen. From a range of 800 yards they kept the Bushmen mainly in the long grass bordering the open road, perspiring in the sun and becoming parched from the lack of water. The road became a scene of desolation with helmets and haversacks, stampeding and shot horses and all manner of equipment scattered over the surface.

Repeated messages to Magato's Nek for help failed to bring relief until Miss Bach, a young English woman who lived in a farmhouse nearby at Woodstock, rode in to the camp on a Bushman's horse. Earlier in the day Miss Bach had gone out in the heat of the battle, heroically attending to and bandaging the wounded as they lay near the road. The Bushmen later collected funds and arranged for a presentation to be made to the courageous

² P. L. Murray (ed.), *Official Records of the Australian Military Contingents to the War in South Africa*, p. 71.

young woman. Her brave conduct remained unrecognised officially as Baden-Powell's despatches to Roberts giving the fullest praise to her actions, together with appropriate recommendations for official recognition, were captured by the Boers. Later General Smuts presented the despatch with the references made by Baden-Powell to Miss Bach.

Meanwhile the Bushmen remained fairly ambushed. Every time a man moved from cover the Mausers would be aimed at him. The safest position was gained by lying absolutely flat. Baden-Powell sent Bushmen from Magato Nek and a detachment of the Protectorate Regiment from Rustenburg. When the Boers found their flanks threatened they retired from the scene at about 4 o'clock.

Captain R. B. Echlin, Third Queensland Mounted Infantry, gave his description of the action at Koster River: 'At 2 a.m. on Sunday 22nd the advance guard was fired on — only one horse hit — no enemy to be seen, so the troops retired to a ridge until daylight. The night was bitterly cold, the men being anxious for the rising of the sun for warmth's sake. When day broke we crossed the Koster River, still in extended order and assembled on a small kopje or small ridge. In about 20 minutes we moved off in column of two until we struck a well defined track leading into the main road to Elands River. This necessitated crossing the Koster River again.

'We had an advance guard and patrolling and flanking parties out. On the right was fairly open country with numerous kopjes distant some 3,000 yards. On our left the cover for the enemy was much denser and closer.

'Shortly after crossing the river the patrols on our right got in touch with the enemy, exchanging shots with them. On our left nothing disturbed us. The order of march was two squadrons of NSW, with Colonel Henry Airey leading, the Queenslanders, then the Victorians, and West Australians bringing up the rear. Half a mile after striking the main road another track bore off to the right. This was followed by Colonel Airey, who sent an orderly back to me with an order to keep to the main road. This put the Queenslanders in the van.

'I had just time to send my advance party out about 200 yards, and was in the act of despatching flanking patrols, when shot after shot was poured into us from the left. At this time we were in full view of the kopjes when mounted. They afterwards proved to be 800 yards from us.

'The Queenslanders had the whole brunt of the fire, being in the lead, and first to come in view of the enemy. No time was wasted in lying down in such cover as could be found. It was sorry protection from the notorious Boer sharpshooters at 800 yards range. The only reason I have for every man not being shot down in the first minute or two was that the Boers must have directed their fire on the horses as they were being led to cover. This gave our men a little time to extend and pick their positions.

'The cover was best in the long grass near the road. There was not a single stone or rock, but some trees six to ten inches in diameter, and some shrubs not unlike saltbush. Our men replied erratically at first, but when properly set went to work, never firing at random. It would never have done to blaze away their 200 rounds when we knew we must wait for relief of darkness for our salvation. Our intermittent firing did not cause the enemy to save his powder, possibly he surmised our objective and kept pegging away.

'Gradually his aim got better and our men more cautious, never without cause showing any part of themselves. Trooper Jim Blair, badly wounded in the left arm staggered down beside me, bringing with him a perfect hail of bullets. I made him lie down on his back so as to offer as small a mark as possible. All the time bullets, the vast majority of them explosive ones, were whistling all around us. One in particular struck the twig of a bush certainly not more than an inch from Blair's head.

'Then we heard a succession of beautiful volleys away to our left among the kopjes. By two o'clock the firing ceased from the kopjes on our front. We could not believe it, some venturing the opinion that it was a ruse to get us on our feet. Volleys were heard and at last the joyful news came along the line that the West Australians were on the kopje. It was 2.30 p.m. and was the first time any of us could stand at full length without the certainty of being shot since 8 a.m.'

Early in the battle Bugler A. E. Forbes, an 18-year-old youth from Queensland given the task of horseholder, moved his horses to what seemed a sheltered position behind a deserted farmhouse close by. The burghers soon noted their presence and in no time all the horses were shot, one bullet passing through the bugler's haversack. Forbes then retired with other horseholders to inside the house, where Bushmen were making a stand by firing through holes knocked in the brick walls. With ammunition running low, Forbes ran out several times in the line of fire, returning on each occasion to the house with cartridges in the saddle wallets he salvaged from the dead horses.

For outstanding courage that day Bugler Arthur Forbes, whose home was in the Brisbane suburb of Milton, was mentioned in despatches by Lord Roberts, and awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal. After the war the Governor-General of Australia visited Queensland and presented young Forbes with a silver bugle and a purse of sovereigns.³

Trooper H. E. Forrest, also a Queensland, had a lucky escape when a bullet struck his breast pocket containing a New Testament, and on deflection passed through his arm. Captain C. W. Robertson was shot dead

³ In the 1914-18 war Forbes served as a chaplain, then as a gunner in the artillery. In July 1917 he became a chaplain again in the AIF in France and England. His AIF appointment terminated in June 1919 but his chaplaincy continued until January 1944 when he was placed on the Retired List.

whilst trying to find a better position for his men. In going to his aid Captain A. G. Eckford was seriously wounded. Lieutenant John Leask, although wounded early in the day, fought on but died afterwards of his wounds. Bugler H. W. Keogh when dismounting received a bullet in the cheek which came out through the back of his neck. Captain F. J. Ingoldby of the West Australian Medical Staff was severely wounded in the right arm while attending to casualties.

Trooper N. P. Gillies, 'C' Squadron New South Wales Citizens' Bushmen, was one of the advance scouts who went to the relief of the men at Koster River. He wrote: 'Nearing the scene I saw about 40 Boers under the cover of trees on the bank of the river. When crossing the river to make my way back to the main body, I was seen by the enemy, and in less time than it takes to tell, my horse was riddled with bullets, and I was in the water with bullets flying around my head in dozens. I crawled along the ground for a few yards and thought it wise to make a halt, as I was being fired at. I had to lay and watch them till sundown when they decamped. I walked back to camp, a distance of 12 miles, none the worse for my experience.'

In the battle at Koster River the Australian casualties amounted to 39, including 9 killed. They were buried in the town cemetery at Rustenburg. On the day following the battle the Presbyterian Chaplain, J. H. G. Auld, read the burial service over the dead Boers near the scene of the fighting. The Bushmen returned to Magato Nek where for several weeks they were kept busy building blockhouses, sangars and trenches, a type of work not to their liking.

CHAPTER 15

The siege of Elands River post

When Lord Roberts became aware of the danger to his small isolated detachments in the face of the burgher resurgence, he decided to withdraw some of the posts including the staging camp at Elands River. The return of General De la Rey to his home country in the west, and the re-emergence of General Lemmer coupled with the arrival of Jan Smuts, the Attorney-General in President Kruger's Government, resulted in the further loosening of the authority the British had so recently gained. Smuts busied himself re-enlisting and reorganising the surrendered burghers and achieved great success.

The post at Elands River, previously garrisoned by a small detachment of Rhodesians under Lieut-Colonel Hore, an Imperial officer, was reinforced considerably with troops. The post held a large quantity of stores as they had piled up there owing to the disruption early in July of the free passage of the convoys from Zeerust passing over the Elands River drifts to Rustenburg by way of Magato Nek. The stores continued to build up in the Post so that by the beginning of August stocks to the value of £100,000 were held.

Since it was no longer safe for the burghers who had kept the oath not

to take up arms again to remain on their farms, some families came in to camp near the British lines.

On 15 July Lieutenant R. E. Zouch, 'A' Squadron New South Wales Citizens' Bushmen, wrote from Elands River Post: 'We are in this dreadful place, and it is hard to say how long we will be kept here. This is the coldest place I have ever known. We have no fuel and the men only one blanket. We came here to fight, but instead we are "dumped" down by the wayside. We have had no letter for nearly six months. This place cannot be made very strong, as there is little good material for the purpose, the ground being a mass of slaty chips, but it is the general opinion that the enemy will hardly attack us at present.'

As the convoys converged on the camp, more patrolling took place in the district and clashes with the enemy became more frequent. In July Lance-Corporal A. C. Wherratt, 'A' Squadron, New South Wales Citizens' Bushmen, wrote: 'We were quite ignorant as to the whereabouts of the Boers until the scouts came galloping back. They had hardly pulled up when the bullets came down like hail. There was no cover to take, no horseholders or anything close. Each man had to hold his own horse and blaze away. We got back to about 600 yards, when we took up a position on the open plain.'

'Captain James Thomas who was in command had his horse shot under him. It was great fun until we began to realise the danger we were in, as they continued to pour in volley after volley. I was lying with my horse's reins around my arm and every time I fired he pulled me back, thus offering the Boers good shooting at me. I must have had my mouth open once, for a bullet came and cut the ground up right in front. I was spitting dirt for an hour afterwards.'

'Our Sergeant Erskine Raymond got a bullet through the shoulder. He was the only one hit, but it was a miracle there were not more. The Boers cannot shoot at short distances but did better at 600 than 300 yards. Lieutenant Zouch got a bullet through the pants. He did not know of it at the time. The Boers eventually got out of the kraal and cleared out. The Boers had three shot dead and six wounded. The Bushmen had one horse shot dead and one man wounded. We have been doing a lot of disarming and commandeering, and have been fired on in these excursions.'

On 18 July the telegraph line to Zeerust was cut and temporarily put out of action. Captain Butters with a detachment at Marico, not many miles away on the Zeerust road, appealed for a Maxim gun because of the large number of Boers seen in the neighbourhood. The only communication with Rustenburg was by helio, but this became uncertain because of the haze generated by the Boers setting fire to the veldt.

The camp continued to receive men. On 22 July at noon 11 Victorians,

horseholders from the Kusters River fight, arrived with 20 horses having broken through the Boer lines. The Third Queensland Mounted Infantry, under Major W. H. Tunbridge, numbered 145 men, including two Tasmanians. This force added considerably to the strength of the camp and proved most useful in the light of impending events. The Queenslanders brought with them Surgeon-Captain A. T. Duka with his medical staff. Until then the camp had neither medical men or appliances. The Queenslanders also had several ambulances and water-carts of which there were previously none. They also carried a number of trenching tools, adding to the few in the camp.

An attack in force on the staging camp had not been expected. Little had been done towards building defences, other than two low walls made from small loose stones on the two main sides of the camp. A start was made to strengthen the stonework with packed earth.

On 25 July 1900 Colonel Hore received intelligence that the enemy planned to attack the post. That night rain fell in torrents, accompanied by thunder and lightning. About this time a start was made at entrenching in the hard surface.

The camp garrison now totalled 505, made up of 105 New South Wales Citizens' Bushmen, 141 Third Queensland Mounted Infantry, 2 Tasmanian Bushmen, 42 Victorian Bushmen, 9 West Australian Bushmen and 201 Rhodesian Volunteers; there were also two Canadians and three others from British units. They were all units from the Rhodesian Field Force, with Colonel Hore in command. Hore, an officer of the 5th Dragoon Guards, had commanded the Protectorate Regiment at Mafeking.

The Bushmen in the ranks seemed to have little appreciation of the dangerous position in which the holding of such a large amount of stores placed the camp, situated as it was in the midst of an enemy lacking supplies. They could not be easily persuaded to take a keen interest in digging trenches.

Captain D. J. Ham, who led the Victorians and West Australians, stated that before going out on patrol on 3 August he left men under Corporal C. W. Norton, Victorian Bushmen, with instructions to dig a trench during his absence, adding a warning that they might be attacked at any time. On his return at sunset he found a trench dug to the shallow depth of six inches only, all that could be removed with a shovel. Across the trench lay a flat slaty stone on which someone had scratched the words: 'Erected to the memory of the Victorians, who were compelled to dig this trench. Fort Funk, 3 August 1900.' Corporal Norton gave a reasonable explanation for himself but Captain Ham ordered the working party to parade the following morning.

On the same day, Friday 3 August, a message by telegraph stated that General Carrington had already left Zeerust with 1,000 men, six field guns

and four pom-poms to cover the retirement of the whole of the garrison to Mafeking. The force was expected to arrive at Elands River Post on the Sunday. That night the entire camp celebrated with a cheerful camp-fire concert, the lights of the fires and the sound of the singing carrying to the surrounding hills. When the echo of the final notes of 'God Save the Queen' died away, the men boiled the billy before settling down for the night. Only a handful of officers knew that General De la Rey with 1,000 burghers accompanied by guns lay out in the nearby hills, ready to strike at any time.

Baden-Powell had selected about six acres as the site for the Elands River Post on the almost flat crest of a low dome-shaped kopje, with slopes falling away to the Elands River. Situated about 40 miles west of Rustenburg, the site rested on a narrow plain two or three miles wide, stretching between two low lines of hills and between which the Elands River flowed in a northerly direction. The post actually lay astride the principal road running between Zeerust and Rustenburg.

A full half mile from the camp in a position within reasonable distance of water, but slightly to the south of the Zeerust road, the British held two defensive posts overlooking the river at Vlaktefontein Drift. Although initially occupied and entrenched by Lieutenant William Cope, the kopje closest to the Zeerust road was afterwards held by Lieutenant Zouch. It became known as Zouch's Kopje. Lieutenant Cope directed the attention of Colonel Hore to the location of a hill a little farther south which actually overlooked Zouch's Kopje. He also commenced the building of sangars on this kopje before handing it over to Captain Butters. A track led down between the two kopjes to the drift from which the camp's water supply was drawn.

Early in the morning of Saturday 4 August, just as the camp began to stir for breakfast preparations, the first alarm came when the Boers opened fire on the watering parties down at the Vlaktefontein Drift. While the parties galloped madly back from the drift the men on Zouch's Kopje and on South Kopje returned the Boer fire coming from across the river and opened up with the Maxim gun.

At the sound of the firing the men in the camp rushed to take their places in the trenches. The first shells fell accurately in the centre of the plateau, tearing down the telegraph lines as the operator was in touch with Zeerust, and falling on the horse lines. In no time the area became a shambles as the unprotected animals, almost 1,500 of them, were on an exposed slope. Horses and mules went down like ninepins. The frightened and badly mutilated animals stampeded in terror, some struggling on shattered stumps of legs, others with mangled bodies stumbled into the trenches. On that first day when most of the animals were killed, the plateau literally ran with their blood. Under the cover of darkness, in an attempt to clean up, the surviving mules were used to drag away the carcasses. When the shells began

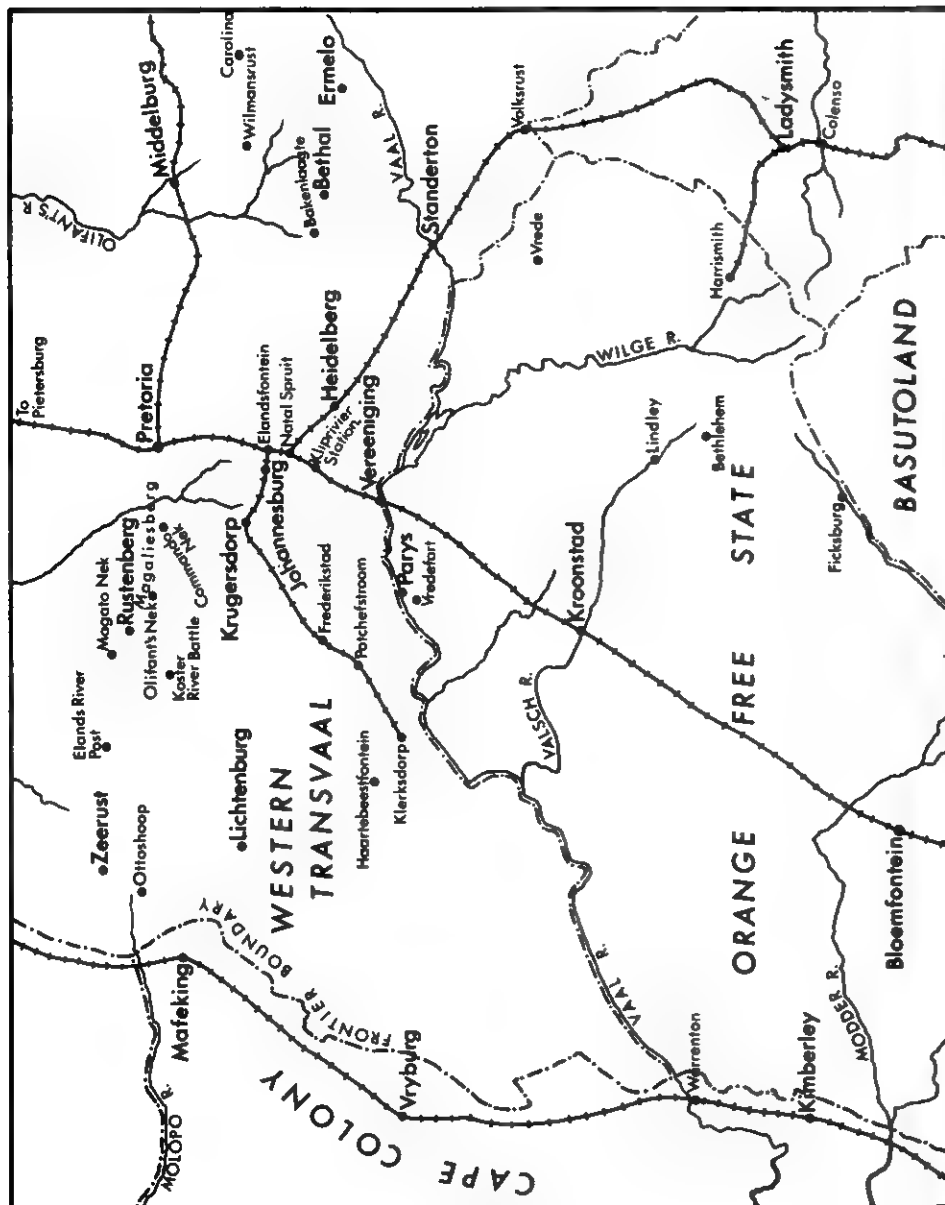
to fall among the oxen, Trooper Joseph Hillier and Trooper John Fortune were ordered to cut them loose, as they threatened to trample the men in a trench not many yards away. With the aid of an African driver Fortune and Hillier rushed in among the infuriated beasts, slashing and hacking away as best they could. With shells falling they completed unscathed a task dangerous in more ways than one, but the African had both legs blown off. From all sides gun fire continued until dark, an estimated 1,700 shells falling on that first day. At night the rifle fire eased, but never entirely ceased for the next 11 days.

Trooper H. E. M. Tully, a Western Australian Bushman, wrote about the first day: 'At 6.30 a.m. on Saturday morning the alarm was given and in about 30 seconds a big shell burst in the camp from the south. Almost at the same time there was a perfect hail of bullets and shells. North, south, east and west they came in simultaneously—pom-poms, shrapnel, 12-pounders and Maxims. We were and are completely surrounded, and a heavy rifle fire comes in only 1,400 yards from us. The big guns are out of our range. We have only one gun, a 7-pounder, which is almost useless against the opposing guns with a superior range, and we have only a few shells.'

When the shooting began, Captain Ham took the Victorians to the shallow trench dug by reluctant diggers only the day before. Corporal Norton was the first man killed. At the end of the siege the particular slab of inscribed slate, once left lying across the uncompleted trench with its pointed message, was found undamaged. Corporal Norton's mates made the very same stone his headstone, turning the stone and carving his name deep into the reverse side.

On the first day the defenders suffered 32 casualties. The wounded were attended to in three ambulance wagons which served as a hospital. They were situated in the centre of the camp, near the horse lines and close to a low sangar. The only other protection was provided by tarpaulins covering a double wall of biscuit tins. Trooper F. J. Bird was one of the first to be treated. A shell tore off his right leg as he lay stretched on the ground sighting his rifle near the Victorians' uncompleted trench. Bird made a good recovery after Surgeon-Captain Duka operated on him and shortened the leg a little further. He was the only man to recover after undergoing surgery. Trooper J. T. Masterton, the first Queenslander hit, later died of his wounds in a hospital at Krugersdorp.

When night fell all who could be spared for the task of digging trenches worked like beavers until dawn. No man now needed to be persuaded. Most of the Bushmen cursed and swore as they worked, in the mood of men determined to hold the hill at all costs. With digging tools in short supply, the men used whatever they could lay their hands on, including bayonets. Picks were so scarce that as much as £3 was offered and taken for half an



Western Transvaal and the Orange Free State

hour's use. Although no large stones covered the site, the rocky slate strata forming the base of the plateau protruded through the surface in a number of places. So all the long night the men dug, gouged and levered to raise the slate slabs from the thin soil, in an all-out effort to get under cover by dawn.

Trooper Tully wrote: 'Our camp is on a little stony rise only a few acres in extent. I am behind the westward trench, the most exposed of the lot, and under the particular fire of three guns. There are 24 men and Lieutenant Bill Cope . . . in this trench. A very mixed crowd, New South Wales, Western Australia, Mashonaland, Victoria, Queensland, one Canadian and a conductor of transport. They land scores of bullets into the meat cases and bags of flour we have for breastworks.'

Each officer used his initiative as to the type of construction and utilised whatever worthwhile materials he could find, without recourse to trenching regulations or the Red Book. By dismantling wagons and placing wheels or any suitable part from the chassis across the top to form a foundation for the overlay of slate and earth, meat cases and flour bags, the trenches became almost bomb proof. The white flour bags were smeared with mud to render them less conspicuous. Some of the trenches had short underground side passages with small kitchens. As the defended area was so small with the backs of the trenches so close to one another, wagons filled with earth were placed in the space between to try and eliminate the danger of being shot in the back by high-flying cross-fire.

Lieutenant Robert Gartside, a Victorian officer who held a forward entrenched post away to the east from the camp with 25 men, said: 'The whole business was quite new and strange to us all, this being our first engagement. I had orders to hold the post with my 25 men against all comers. I asked the men if they were all prepared to stop there in face of all risks; if there was a man who was not prepared to sell his life dearly he could go to another part of the fort. I am proud to say that they all said they would stick to me through thick and thin. These men were composed of Victorians and West Australians.'

Throughout the first week efforts were made to form a better wall around the hospital. Every night tins of food and boxes from the convoys and full bags of flour and sugar were built up closely around the ambulance wagons and then buttressed wherever possible by sloping banks of earth.

Early on the second day of the siege, Sunday 5 August, through field glasses the Boers could be seen returning from scouting along the Zeerust road. The enemy also moved several gun locations and placed 100 riflemen in position, as well as marking the range on the road in readiness for the approach of General Carrington's relief force.

At Marico River within sound of the gunfire at Elands River, Carrington left Paget's Horse to guard the baggage. He advanced along the road towards

the Elands River drifts with a column of 650 men, and armament consisting of four 15-pounder guns manned by New Zealand gunners, and two pom-poms. The column included the New South Wales Imperial Bushmen Contingent and detachments of the Kimberley Light Horse. Cameron's Scouts, a small detachment of 24 men raised in Victoria under Lieutenant J. McL. Cameron, served that day as a bodyguard to General Carrington.

The relief force advanced to within two miles of Elands River before the Boer and New Zealand artillery engaged. The men continued to ride forward in extended order until they were held up by Boer riflemen waiting in well-placed positions on both flanks. At this stage Carrington's leading scouts could actually be seen from the beleaguered camp. The Reverend James Green, a padre from Sydney, told how by making use of holes left in the wall built around the hospital wagons he watched the action through field glasses and described its progress to the wounded.

Soon after 4 o'clock the Boer gunners got right on range, landing a salvo near where the general's staff were standing. One shell fell between Carrington and Lieut-Colonel E. T. Wallack, a Tasmanian, and killed several horses. The Boers also shot a horse out of one of the gun teams, making it very difficult to get horses across from the transport wagons. Carrington then ordered a general retirement to Marico River, 17 miles back. Although beset by snipers all the way the retirement took place in good order.

Trooper F. W. King, a New South Wales Imperial Bushman, commented: 'It was pretty lively while it lasted, but we retired, why I don't know, but I suppose the General does.'

On that day also about 400 shells fell on the camp plateau. During the night the enemy made a determined attempt to stop the water-carts as they went down to the river between the two kopjes. With steady fire the escort drove the Boers away from the opposite bank.

On 6 August Baden-Powell marched from Rustenburg with a force of 1,000 men, including Bushmen and Rhodesians. He marched under orders to relieve Elands River Post. However, the nearer he approached to the camp the fainter the sound of the conflict seemed. Baden-Powell therefore became convinced that Carrington must have successfully effected the relief and that the whole force must even then be in process of being evacuated towards Zeerust. So he turned back, taking his column through Magato Nek to Commando Nek, closer to Pretoria. By neglecting to send scouts well ahead, Baden-Powell had in fact allowed himself to fall into error by the slackening sounds of receding gunfire due to Carrington's hurried retreat westward.

Trooper N. P. Gillies, New South Wales Bushmen, wrote: 'During the bombardment we were camped at Magato Nek, about twenty miles from Elands River, and from day to day we could hear the boom of guns from

daylight till dark. We only went a few miles to the relief and then turned back, for some unaccountable reason.'

The Australians and Rhodesians were now very much on their own, without any immediate hope of relief, for Carrington had arrived in Zeerust convinced that the besieged colonials could not possibly hold out much longer. He therefore telegraphed Lord Roberts in Pretoria to the effect that the men at Elands River had no alternative other than immediate surrender. A few days later a Bushman serving with Baden-Powell's column, wrote from Commando Nek: 'The Boers we hear captured a big column at Elands River, and we also hear that they captured or killed nearly all of our "A" Squadron. Billy Cope was there.'

Cabled reports appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 9 August saying that Carrington had withdrawn to Zeerust after relieving the Bushmen. On the following day the cables contained a statement, said to have been made by Lord Roberts, that the garrison had surrendered. This was supported in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 11 August by a cable saying that 'the Boers had barred Carrington's relief and 300 Bushmen were captured'.

Questions were asked in the New South Wales Parliament. In response to these and the public concern, the Premier, Sir William Lyne, cabled the British High Commissioner at Cape Town. The reply on 15 August referred to a report issued by Lord Roberts on the 7th saying: 'The garrison at Elands River has I fear been captured.'

Nevertheless the notion of surrender never even entered the heads of the Bushmen and Rhodesians, even though they were completely surrounded, outnumbered and outgunned in their isolated post. The siege soon attracted the attention of numerous small commandos operating from the Magaliesberg Range, so the attacking force quickly grew to somewhere between 2,000 and 3,000 possessing an armament of six guns, three pom-poms and a machine-gun. In anticipation of carting off a great amount of stores and provisions the Boers had provided themselves with a long line of wagons.

The colonials really had no reply to the shelling by the Boer gunners from the safety of the hills 2,400 yards away, other than the security of the trenches which they soon began to call forts. On the second day the enemy reduced the range, moving the guns up to 2,100 yards, but accurate rifle fire forced them back. From then on the guns stayed out of accurate rifle range. Three pom-poms barked almost continuously from 1,500 yards, firing bursts of 25 one-pound shells from a belt. Accurate rifle fire from the first day worried these Boer gunners, so that eventually they were forced to build up earth works around the guns. The post garrison had one old 7-pounder muzzle-loading gun and a Maxim. Captain Butters on Zouch's Kopje also had a Maxim gun.

Lieutenant J. W. Annat led a patrol of 25 Queenslanders against a particu-

larly troublesome pom-pom. By stealthily crawling through the grass for more than 200 yards the Queenslanders opened fire so effectively that the burghers were forced to retire. Eventually they removed the gun after a burgher by crawling forward attached a rope to it and managed to haul it back. On Sunday 5 August Annat tried hard but unsuccessfully for permission to take a raiding party that night to try and capture the gun.

Lieutenant Annat had taken part in the relief of Mafeking. He served with distinction in the earliest days of the siege, quickly making a name for himself. He often stayed in an advanced position for hours to signal back the range of the Boer guns. At dusk on Monday 6 August he was killed by a 12-pounder shell exploding practically at his feet. His own men carried his body at midnight, covered by a Union Jack, to a burial spot just outside the trenches.

The old 7-pounder gun proved to be of little use to the Bushmen, even though they managed to score a hit with it on a farmhouse in which snipers were taking cover. The gun had to be taken down no less than four times by Major Tunbridge, who worked untiringly to try and keep it in service. The shortage of shells also restricted its value. In addition many of its shells were damaged and burred in transit. By going to work for a day and a night with a file, Major Tunbridge succeeded in making some of the shells serviceable. Colonel Hore issued an order urging the need for restraint in the use of all ammunition, together with the warning that they might have to hold out for a long time.

On 8 August a shell hit the hospital where the Red Cross flag was flying. Trooper Frederick Harth of Queensland, already suffering from a chest wound, received five pieces of shrapnel in his body which carried small pieces of khaki into the wound, but he survived to be invalided home. Trooper Bird, the Victorian Bushman who had already lost his right leg, was hit on the forehead by a shell splinter and several pieces of shrapnel lodged in his good left leg. Trooper Frank Davidson was wounded at the hospital by a Martini-Henri bullet while attending a wounded man.

Just before noon on the same day a smartly uniformed ZARP Police Lieutenant approached from Cossack Hill in the east to within 800 yards, under cover of a white flag. An officer went out to meet him at that point. He came from De la Rey, bearing a letter sent by Lieutenant F. J. Douglas, a medical staff officer with the South Australian Bushmen. In the letter Douglas asked for bandages to dress the wounds of a fellow South Australian. Both men were prisoners in a laager four miles distant. The rider returned with bandages and medical supplies. He also carried a note of protest from Colonel Hore concerning the shelling of the hospital.

The very next day the rider again approached the post. Whereas previously he came on a Yeoman's saddle, on this occasion he aimed further to impress by riding on a Bushman's saddle.

These events gave the garrison a respite from the shelling. In the following rather lengthy communication De la Rey offered surrender terms for the garrison with safe conduct to a British camp:

9/8/00

Assistant-Commandant General De la Rey to Lieut-Colonel Hore,
Commanding Officer,
British Camp, Elands River.

I regret that some patients and wounded in the hospital were fired on from my cannons. I am obliged to tell you that it was your Honour's fault as your hospital-ambulance is in a very small camp in the vicinity of your cannon, as placed by your Honour, so that cannon-fire would most likely strike the hospital.

I have the honour to inform you that despatches have come in, the truth of which is undoubted, stating that Rustenburg, Olifant's Nek and Magato's Nek, have been evacuated by the British, and are in our possession. In reference to the force of General Carrington, I myself drove him across the Marico River, and left a force to follow him which, on its return, reported to me that he had fled through Zeerust. As your Honour's camp was principally placed here to guard the line of communication, which no longer exists, I wish your Honour to earnestly consider that the time has come to have no further bloodshed. Your resistance, which has been kept up so bravely, must now come to an end.

If your Honour surrenders your camp with everything in it (without hiding or ruining anything in it), then I am prepared to give a security to your Honour that I will send you and your troops to the nearest British force to which you choose to go. Your commissioned officers, in such a case, will retain their arms in recognition of your courage in defence of your camp.

Please be so kind as to give me your reply as soon as possible. If necessary, I am ready at any time to hold a conference with your Honour on the subject, to arrange details.

J. H. De la Rey,
Assistant Commandant-General
Z.A.R.²

After first formally consulting Major Tunbridge, the offer to surrender was declined by Colonel Hore.

Sergeant Leslie Donkin, Third Queensland Mounted Infantry, made this comment in a letter to Brisbane: 'I forgot to say they also wanted us to give up our boots as well, as they were very short of these articles.'

On 10 August an attempt by Colonel Hore to contact General Carrington with an appeal for assistance failed when David, the African runner with the message, was intercepted and taken by the Boers.

Realising that the quickest way to force the submission of the garrison rested in the withholding of the water supply from the drift, the Boers brought several guns to bear on the kopjes near the river held by Captain Butters and Lieutenant Zouch. After a day's bombardment they attacked the

² G. B. Barton and others, *The Story of South Africa*, Vol 2, p. 485.

south kopje held by Captain Butters with 80 Rhodesians and New South Welshmen. The Boers stormed up the hill in the dim light at dusk. The colonials withheld fire until the assault party came within 50 yards of the trenches. They were so close that the voices of the leaders could be distinctly heard urging the burghers forward. The attack failed before the concentrated rifle volleys from both kopjes and the machine-gun.

On the following day the burghers tried again by going up the slope behind a herd of sheep and goats, in the manner of the Matabele. Captain Butters, with experience gained in the Matabele wars, could not be deceived by such tactics. The attack fared no better than that of the previous day. Sheep, goats and Boers either fell or were put to flight by well-timed volleys from the kopjes.

As a result of the nightly battle for water the supply was far from plentiful. Sergeant Donkin reported: 'We send three carts and the horses down every night and the snipers line themselves along the creek and give us fits. The night before last we had two blacks and two horses shot, and last night several horses and mules. It is not the most comfortable thing in the world to be there and get shot at and not see anything to shoot at.' Trooper Tully wrote: 'When all the water-carts are filled there is only enough for one day's supply.'

Back at the camp Squadron Sergeant-Major James Mitchell, 'A' Squadron, New South Wales Citizens' Bushmen, received a bad wound in the leg. Captain Duka had to amputate above the knee, but Mitchell died on 11 August after lingering for three days. His burial took place at midnight. Colonel Hore had forbidden the men to attend burial services, allowing only officers to leave the trenches. A sudden burst of shell fire compelled the burial party to take shelter in the open grave, the Boer gunners most probably thinking they were firing on a trenching party. Trooper J. E. Walker died of wounds on the 6th. A few months earlier he had accepted the plaudits of the crowd in Sydney for his win on Uproar in the 'Our Boys Plate' at the Bushmen's gala day at Randwick.

Trooper Kelvedon Gulson with a bullet wound in the arm considered himself to be worse off in the hospital with the dying and the wounded than in the forts. As soon as he could manage to do so he went back to the trenches, where he gave a good account of himself from the breastworks. The hospital treated and dressed the wound of an African with blood flowing freely from the calf of his leg. The man declined to stay in the hospital, preferring to take cover under a wagon. During the night the wound troubled him so much that he persuaded himself that the bullet must be still embedded in the leg. So he returned to the hospital where the wound was probed without a bullet being found. Nevertheless, when the man came out of the chloroform he was given a bullet which from that day he carried as a much-prized exhibit.

As the days passed the Australians became very tired of life in the trenches; by day the sun was hot and at night they shivered in the cold. The officers had difficulty in persuading the more restive spirits to keep under cover. Some of the more foolhardy individuals stepped out in front of the trenches, openly daring the snipers. Some of the snipers operated from nearby farmhouses flying the white flag of neutrality. After nightfall the men would emerge from the trenches to stretch their legs and exercise. When the Boer gunners became aware of this practice they would open up with field guns and pom-poms.

Although they had the numbers, the Boers never tried to rush the camp, being as unwilling as they usually were to accept heavy losses. Snipers made themselves secure in small sangars built within easy rifle shot. Sergeant Donkin wrote: 'It is hardly safe to stick one's hands above the bags, as we are completely surrounded by Boer snipers, who are only 900 yards away.' At one period a particularly active sharpshooter kept such an accurate mark on a trench that the men decided that something had to be done about him.

Colonel Hore had forbidden night sorties, although men eager to go raiding across the enemy lines were always coming up with some proposal. So it is not surprising that the order was sometimes disregarded by the Australians. One night a Bushman after removing his boots and pulling on four pairs of socks, moved away clear of the trenches and crawled down the slope in line with the sangar from where the troublesome sniper operated. At the end of a long and cautious approach to his great disappointment the Bushie found the sangar unoccupied. Just as he was about to turn back he looked up to see the sniper asleep in the fork of a tree, with his rifle resting over the boughs. The Bushman shot the Boer, then quietly returned to camp with 50 English sovereigns found in the dead man's pockets.

The Australians made a number of night raids, usually carried out after noting the source of rifle fire from some particular ridge. They frequently surprised and inflicted casualties on sleepy burghers caught napping. One night an unofficial patrol of six Bushmen crept up on a farmhouse known to be used by snipers. Rushing the house and pushing open the door, they found only one man inside. Although somewhat disappointed the raiders were unexpectedly rewarded by being able to return to camp with 15 newly baked bread loaves, taken from the kitchen table.

Unshaken by the activities of the enemy, but plagued by the stench from putrid bodies of the 1,500 transport animals scattered over the plateau, and of necessity unwashed from the daily ration of a quart of water to each man, the garrison kept the Union Jack flying again as often as it was shot down. Trooper G. W. Aitcheson, 'B' Squadron, New South Wales Citizens' Bushmen, wrote to his parents in Mudgee: 'Every morning we used to hoist the old Union Jack, and take it down at night. Sometimes they would knock it down, but only to be put up again.'

From the tenth day the shelling became less frequent, although the Mausers continued to play on the trenches. It was thought in the camp that the enemy was running short of shells. On Sunday 12 August a messenger approached on horseback with a white flag, bringing an offer from De la Rey to hand over two prisoners, Lieutenant A. E. Collins, who was wounded, and Lieutenant F. J. Douglas, a medical staff officer. Both men were South Australians. A Cape cart was sent from the camp to bring the two men back.

On the same day the Boers started a veldt fire that burnt well with the aid of a strong south-east wind. Any thoughts they may have entertained of the fire spreading through the camp came to nothing, for Hore had taken the early precaution of burning a strip 100 yards wide around the position.

About this time De la Rey sent an African runner with a message for General de Wet, who was arriving in the area with a number of British columns right at his heels. Before he could reach de Wet, the African was caught and searched by British scouts. In this way General Kitchener at the end of a long and unsuccessful pursuit of de Wet and his commando, learned that the Elands River garrison was undefeated. Kitchener's columns, already weary after weeks of chasing and failing to catch the elusive de Wet, then turned to march nearly 50 miles to the relief of the garrison. Before their approach De la Rey's commandos packed up and melted away.

On 15 August to the surprise of the garrison the Mauser fire faded completely. The Boer riflemen failed to reply to the Bushmen's volleys. On the kopje near the river Captain Butters heard sounds that could only mean that the Boers' southern laager was breaking up. At 4.30 that afternoon men in the camp with field glasses thought they could pick up figures moving some miles away to the south-east. Others said the objects were only trees. An African runner sent out to get information, returned at 11.45 p.m. without having found out anything.

At 3 a.m. on 16 August the camp outposts challenged two riders, one of them being Corporal J. E. Tratham, a West Australian. The scouts had ridden ahead of the main relieving force through the dissolving Boer lines. About four hours later Kitchener and his staff rode in with the main column.

For the next day or so the approaching British columns continued to converge on the Bushmen's battered post, littered with the wreckage of wagons and the debris from smashed cases of meat and jam, biscuit tins and flour bags. The surface of the hill was scarred with the deep lines of the hastily dug trenches and the clear air had become fouled by the putrifying carcasses scattered and rotting outside the trenches under the warm August sun.

On the plain around the colonials' post the columns of Generals Kitchener, Hart, H. L. Smith-Dorrien, Broadwood and C. P. Ridley lay camped — in all 25,000 troops. In the darkness of the night their widespread campfires flickered incessantly. The New South Wales Mounted Rifles and the New

South Wales Army Medical Corps shared in a warm reunion with the New South Welshmen in the garrison. There were many instances of cordial recognition.

The men of the garrison, given no opportunity to wash for nearly two weeks, were black with dirt. All were unshaven and heavily bearded, their clothes in tatters and some without tunics. On the other hand Trooper George Sutherland, one of the horseholders who had escaped through the Boer lines from Koster's River, in describing the appearance of Kitchener's infantry said: 'They were in rags. Most of them had their toes sticking out of their boots.'

When Kitchener inspected the defences he was very surprised to learn from the Australian officers that most of the trench work had been dug with the bayonet. Sergeant Donkin commented: 'We have seen a great many big wigs now — namely Lord Kitchener and Lord Methuen and the Duke of Teck. The big wigs of the army don't seem very different from our own officers.'

When Kitchener's officers inspected the site some were so impressed that they began to pick up pieces of shell for souvenirs. Seeing this the Bushmen, who had already done some souveniring themselves, started a ready trade with the English officers, getting as much as £5 for an unexploded pom-pom shell.

In the defence of the post there were 80 casualties. Of these 20 were either killed or died of wounds. Colonel Hore in his report to Lord Kitchener said: 'Whereas all ranks had so signally distinguished themselves, it was impossible to enumerate them by names.' Lord Roberts sent the following message: 'Before Colonel Hore's Elands River Force breaks up please convey to the Commander and all ranks my high appreciation of the gallant defence they made of the Elands River position, from 4 to 16 August.'

Lieut-Colonel R. V. Kelly, New South Wales Army Medical Corps, wrote from Krugersdorp on 22 August 1900: 'You will read in the papers of the defence of Elands River Post last week. The Australian Bushmen held a laager for 12 days and nights, exposed to an artillery fire from eight to ten guns. More than 600 shells were poured into them during that time. They were offered the right to march out with their arms and join us if they would surrender. It was as grand a defence as the Residency of Lucknow and, in that these men would have been safe if they gave in, it was a plucky performance. We were marched to their relief and they cheered when we came in sight, and received us with great excitement and affectionate greetings. W. Cope, Zouch and other NSW men were there. That awful cold weather has gone, we have got hot spring days.'

On the day following the relief the troops mustered to take part in a service at the small cemetery situated just beyond the trenches. Rows of

whitened stones marked the outline of the graves. The mates of the fallen men formed headstones from some of the smoothest slabs of slate on the trench parapets. On these they carved the names so deep and well that they have endured to this day. The Queensland Mounted Infantry formed a firing party and the Last Post was sounded.

The padre, the Reverend James Green, later wrote: 'On 17 August we had a great military funeral service. The troops were drawn up in a square around the graves, and after the service had been read the firing party fired volleys, during which the Buglers played the different bugle calls. The men collected white stones and placed them round the graves. Headstones of slate, got from the surrounding hill, were put up and the names of the dead carved thereon, and a barbed wire fence was constructed around the little cemetery.'

The following extracts from letters were written during and after the siege. The first from Trooper F. W. Stanton, 'A' Squadron, New South Wales Citizens' Bushmen read: 'Elands River 6 August. We have been bombarded by heavy guns and pom-poms for two days. This is the third and they are still at us; there is a lull today so I am writing to you. They made a start Saturday morning, and for six hours they were attacking us from all sides. It is marvellous that a lot more were not killed the first day, though we lost 8 killed and 25 wounded, and in the three days about 1,500 horses, mules and bullocks. One shell burst within 10 feet of me, killing one of our chaps. Another came just as close but did no damage. They reckon we have been receiving shells at the rate of 400 a day, including pom-poms. These last are horrible affairs, 18 or 20 bursting on about half an acre as quick as you can count.

'Elands River, 10 August: I am glad to say I am still alive. We are in a state of siege, though all the guns have disappeared at present and we are having a spell. Nothing flying but the Mauser bullets, just to keep us lively. The first two days were terrible, the next four we only used to get about half an hour of it at night and morning; two or three shells and perhaps a dozen pom-poms at night. One of the Queensland lieutenants in charge of our trench was killed by a 12-pounder shell at night. We were much cut up as he was really a good man. (Thursday date uncertain). During the fortnight we lost all the horses but 70, all our bullocks and mules. Of our men 12 killed and 58 wounded.

'Last night we occupied the portion the Boers had left. They must have had a pretty tough time of it at this particular spot, as every stone was spotted all over with the bullet marks and blood. We are all happy now we have had a cut in, it has made different men of us all. We were disposed to be discontented, but now we are quite good-natured. I don't know what sort of men war makes of us, but certain it is, the one stone that has a lot of Boer blood on it decorates the most prominent part of our trench, and we point it

out with pride to everyone. It shows that if they bagged some of us, we bagged some of them, and considering they had seven big guns, and two Maxims and a pom-pom, and we had only an old seven-pounder and two Maxims, I consider we came out very well.'

Lance-Corporal O. F. H. Middleton, also of 'A' Squadron, wrote from Mafeking on 3 September: 'We had great forts at Elands River. When Kitchener arrived we were all underground. We used to camp in the forts with one man on watch, and as soon as the flash of a big gun was seen we all used to get underground quite safe. All the Lords and Generals with Kitchener said it was wonderful how we held out, and that they were very proud of the Australian Bushmen, and that it was one of the grandest things of the war. We lost heavily, 81 killed or wounded, but then the Boer did not take us. The fourth day a shell cut the flag rope, and let it down. We were out and had it floating in about two minutes, and gave a cheer, and back into our forts again with no one hit.

'The first night we had three men hit, but after that no one was killed. I think we must have done a lot of damage. We used to wait until we saw the flash of a rifle, and then fire at it. The worst thing of all was that the Boers loaded the guns at sundown, and trained them on the camp, when they thought we would be out and about getting exercise. William Hunt was put in the hospital, and proved himself a brick, carrying in the wounded and helping the doctors, for which he has been mentioned for bravery. There were so many brave things done that none of us was mentioned.' Hunt was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal.

More than 70 years have passed since the successful stand by the Australians and Rhodesians at Elands River. Very few Australians of today would have heard of the story. Although the siege took place near the beginning of Australia's military history, there is no reason why the story should not be better known, for the action at Elands River was one of the greatest achievements of the Australian troops in South Africa. Writing shortly after the event, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle declared: 'When the ballad makers of Australia seek for a subject, let them turn to Elands River, for there was no finer fighting in the war.'

A British officer in a letter to the London *Times* wrote: 'I visited the place yesterday, and Cronje's laager was a joke to it. Yesterday was the 13th day and they lost 77 men. It is impossible to give you anything like an idea of what they must have gone through. I do hope that Great Britain will show its gratitude to those Australians for the brightest page in the history of the war.'

Before the camp broke up, the names of the men who took part in the siege were taken down and recorded. Trooper George Sutherland said: 'They have taken all our names, they are talking about issuing a medal clasp for the siege.'

Weeks later, when the Elands River Bushmen paraded before the Commander-in-Chief, Lord Roberts, in their camp at Daspoort, on the northern outskirts of Pretoria, Lance-Corporal John Burns, 'D' Squadron, New South Wales Citizens' Bushmen, wrote: 'Lord Kitchener told us that he would try and get us a special clasp in recognition of our defence. I don't know whether we will get the clasp or not. Our names were taken down by Lord Kitchener, but the other day when Lord Roberts addressed us "on our splendid stand" as he called it, he only told us he was proud of the work we had done.' It was the end of the matter as the War Office never did award a bar, or any form of distinction. This resulted in a feeling among the officers and men that the War Office would scarcely have been so niggardly with English troops.

With only a brief period of training behind them the Bushmen had met the enemy in force, successfully matching their determination and courage against his. From the almost gay abandon of the progress through the Australian capital cities, they were destined to be tested in battle on a bare hill in the western Transvaal.

To this day the Bushmen retain a corner of the hill they once held. Its battled acres are mostly bare and quiet except for the summer storms that lash the land. The rank summer grass, growing long and tall, partly conceals the rocky mounds marking the Bushmen's resting places. Then winter casts thick frost across the veldt, defeating the grass, to reveal again the graves where the Bushmen rest. When August comes the brown veldt begins to warm and stir under the almost perpetually blue skies. But August days are different now. The hills are silent, no shelling rends the air nor do the Mausers play. Only the trenches remain in outline, silent testimony to how 500 Australians and Rhodesians fought, defying for almost two weeks 2,500 burghers from Paul Kruger's Republic.

In the published works of George Essex Evans, the Australian poet, there is the verse 'Elands River' from which come these lines:

'We saw the guns of Carrington come on and fall away;
We saw the ranks of Kitchener across the kopje grey —
For the sun was shining then
Upon twenty thousand men —
And we laughed, because we knew, in spite of hell-
fire and delay,
On Australia's page forever
We had written Elands River —
We had written it forever and a day!'

CHAPTER 16

In pursuit of General de Wet

The British columns, which by their entry into the Magaliesberg district had so fortuitously relieved the post at Elands River, had already been several weeks on the trail of the elusive General Christiaan de Wet. When General Prinsloo surrendered in the Orange Free State to General Hunter with 4,000 men, de Wet managed to escape through a Drakensberg mountain pass. Several British columns gave chase when de Wet with 1,500 men, artillery and a line of wagons stretching for 3 miles, rode north-west until he found himself with his back to the river Vaal as the British columns closed in.

The New South Wales Mounted Rifles, the West Australians and the New South Wales Army Medical Corps left Bethlehem with Brigadier-General Ridley's 2nd Mounted Infantry Brigade to join in the hunt. They marched through country depleted by the ravages of war with deserted farmhouses, neglected fields and the railway often blocked by burnt-out trains wrecked and left by de Wet after seizing the supplies and provisions.

In a letter written from Bethlehem on 10 July 1900 the West Australian Medical Officer, Major G. F. McWilliams, wrote: 'De Wet has been giving a good deal of trouble along the railway line. His plan of action is to charge down on small parties of troops who are guarding the line and take them

prisoner. In this way he has succeeded in getting quite a small army together, principally Imperial Yeomanry. His men now wear khaki uniforms taken from the "Tommies", so it is difficult to distinguish friend from foe.'

On the afternoon of 19 July the mounted infantry took part in a running fight for 8 miles near Palmietfontein, 20 miles north of Lindley in the Orange Free State. The British guns in the centre shelled the rear of the Boer convoy, while the mounted infantry harassed the flanks. The West Australians clashed with the crack Boer scouts led by Danie Theron. At dusk Theron broke off the engagement and in the gathering darkness the pursuit ceased.

The first West Australian Mounted Infantry lost its commanding officer, Major Hatherley Moor, and four men killed. When the news was received in Western Australia, flags were flown at half mast throughout the colony. Major Moor was the officer who rallied the West Australians on the kopje east of Slingsfontein, and led them in the dash against Botha's rearguard at Diamond Hill. In pre-war days he served five years in Natal with a mountain battery. In Rhodesia he was in the service of Rhodes' British Chartered Company, and saw action in the war against the Matabele in 1897.

De Wet reached the rugged country beyond Vredefort, a town only 7 miles south of the Vaal. The New South Wales Mounted Rifles scouts discovered part of his rearguard near a farm nestling below a small spur. Working with Kitchener's Horse and the Imperial Bushmen, they seized six wagons loaded with grain — part of de Wet's convoy. In the farmhouse they also found several burghers in bed with their clothes on. De Wet, not being in the least willing to lose the grain, fiercely counter-attacked with Danie Theron's Scouts.

On a small open plain a sharp and bitter fight followed. Often not more than 200 yards separated several hundred burghers from an almost equal number of colonials. At the end of an hour when the British brought two guns up, the Boers withdrew. Their casualties were 17, two being killed. The casualties of the colonials amounted to 35 with two killed.

Captain Neville Howse of the New South Wales Army Medical Corps galloped from the cover of a kraal to try and save a young trumpeter who lay where he had fallen in the unsheltered field of fire. When his horse was shot, Howse continued towards the wounded lad on foot over a bullet-swept zone. Dressing the wounds, he lifted the trumpeter up and carried him back to safety through heavy cross fire. For his gallantry Captain Howse received the Victoria Cross, thus becoming the first Australian to win the coveted honour. To this day there is no other instance of the award being given to an Australian serving in a medical corps.

Neville Howse came from the town of Orange. In South Africa he was promoted from lieutenant to captain. Later he returned to South Africa as a major in the Australian Commonwealth Army Medical Corps. In the 1914-

18 War he had a distinguished record. At Gallipoli in 1915 he took part in the landing on the first day. In later years as Sir Neville Howse he held several portfolios in the Federal Government. He died in London in 1930.

At Vredefort the New South Wales Army Medical Corps hastily set up a hospital in a schoolhouse. When they were visited by General Ridley, he was full of praise for the speedy improvisation and for the standard of medical care.

On 30 July 1900 Lance-Corporal M. H. Reynolds, 'D' Squadron, New South Wales Mounted Rifles, wrote from Vredefort: 'I am with a column chasing de Wet. One morning we moved east, and near Heilbron came on de Wet. In this engagement the brunt of the fighting fell on the mounted infantry and chiefly our (Colonel De Lisle's) corps, and we were sniping, charging, fighting and struggling all day. Many of the Boers were clothed in British uniforms and helmets that they had captured. We drove them back, both sides using artillery freely. Next morning there was the same sniping on our left, but the artillery shifted them.

'We followed de Wet and fought a stubborn day's fight with him outside Vredefort. The Boers actually extended and started to charge our pom-pom. We spread out all around it and let them have a few shots and the pom-pom did the rest. They retired in confusion. However, they still hold strong positions in the rocky hills both on this and the Transvaal side of the Vaal River, and are using artillery on us. We are doing the same on them.

'The same night our "D" Company under Lieutenants George Legge and Bill Watson, started to find out the position of the Boer laager. A mad expedition you will no doubt say. There were 30 of us; everything that might rattle had been muffled. No pipes were lit and there was no talking. A hasty retreat was impossible for us, on account of the wire fences which we had to cut through. After proceeding about 10 miles on the right flank, we considered we had got to their rear, and then swung into their position. It was an anxious time.

'After going about three miles we got close under a large kopje, then dismounted and threw out scouts to prevent a surprise. Lieutenant Legge and two others walked to the top of the kopje and down the slope. Seeing mounted men all ready for action they quietly got back. We were all this time inside the Boer lines and now had to get out. A large dog at a house nearby started barking furiously. Our horses snorted with the cold. A little more would have roused the Boer camp. We struck right off their position and circled round towards our own camp, but as daylight drew near Lieutenant Legge thought we might try a rocky kopje about five miles from our camp.

'So before sunrise in extended order we rode up to it and luckily for us the Boers had left it for warmer quarters. We surprised the resident farmer and

family. While some of our men were at the dam, and a cavalry patrol was approaching us from our camp, we heard ping! ping! crack! come from the next kopje. The cavalry retreated, and we rushed to our posts. All day long we kept up a sharp rifle duel with the Boers, whom we estimated to be about 300 strong, as against our 30. We kept under cover, and a splendid one it was, of great massive boulders. We fired at the Boers whenever they appeared, resting our rifles on the rocks, in order to get good steady shooting.

On 6 August, despite the presence of British columns on both banks of the Vaal, de Wet managed to cross undetected by the wagon ford at Schoeman's Drift. He immediately set off through the Transvaal in the general direction of De la Rey at Elands River Post.

General Methuen, having waited under orders with a strong force lower down on the northern bank, started in hot pursuit. By the use of every strategy he knew, de Wet maintained his advantage. In order to deceive he split his convoy in two. Then by setting alight the dry winter grass he provided a screen of smoke and flames between his rearguard and the khaki-clad soldiers. Nevertheless, Methuen succeeded in rather effectively shelling the rearguard, forcing them to lose wagons and men. By continuing to hang on grimly Methuen frequently forced the burghers to flee on empty stomachs, giving them little rest from his encroaching columns.

Approaching the Magaliesberg Range, Methuen veered slightly to the west, to prevent de Wet linking up with De la Rey. Kitchener meanwhile was marching close on his heels from the south. When the outline of the Magaliesberg loomed like a wall ahead of him, de Wet without the slightest hesitation headed straight for Olifant's Nek.

On 9 August Hamilton and Baden-Powell, acting under instructions, completed the retirement to Commando Nek from Rustenburg and Olifant's Nek. On the same day a small commando was withdrawn from the force besieging Elands River Post to hold Olifant's Nek.

When Roberts heard that de Wet was heading north in the direction of Olifant's Nek, he at once ordered Hamilton to proceed to the Nek to be in the right position at least to head off de Wet and so force him back towards the oncoming columns. Hamilton's orders were to arrive at Olifant's Nek by marching through the Hekpoort Valley. A cable cart sent with the column provided telegraphic communication with Roberts in Pretoria. On the night of 12 August all messages ceased when the cable was cut.

Mainly to be in the best position to detect de Wet's approach from the south, Hamilton took the most southern but a somewhat more circuitous road through the Hekpoort Valley. On the afternoon of 14 August the column arrived at Olifant's Nek just too late to close the gate, for de Wet with his commandos and wagons had slipped through the Nek that very morning.

In the great chase from the Orange Free State to the Transvaal no fewer than 40,000 troops were engaged in trying to overtake the rapidly moving guerrilla leader.

Lieut-Colonel Kelly, New South Wales Army Medical Corps, wrote from Krugersdorp on 22 August: 'We had five weeks of hard forced marches, sometimes starting at 2 a.m., riding until 11 o'clock, and starting again in the afternoon. One day we marched from 6 a.m. till 12 at night, and started again at 5 a.m., and in the end de Wet's army escaped through some pass. My old horse died last week — 14 August. He was simply done. When he was dying the rearguard of de Wet's army fired into us, wounding three men, including General De Lisle.'

Once inside the range, de Wet moved eastward, skirting Baden-Powell holding Commando Nek, before swinging north. On the same day as Kitchener relieved Elands River Post, Methuen swept a commando from Magato Nek. From Olifant's Nek, Hamilton contacted de Wet's rearguard, going after him towards Warm Bad in the north. De Wet then broke up his force, some trekking further north and others east.

Taking 250 riders with him, de Wet decided to make a bid to return to the Orange Free State. With all the passes in the hands of the British, he was forced to cross the Magaliesberg Range between Commando Nek and Olifant's Nek. Taking full advantage of cover provided by a long kloof, the band of horsemen emerged beneath the bare summit of the range, leading the horses with difficulty by a way normally frequented only by baboons. For brief intervals they must have appeared like riders in the sky against the well-defined outline of the mountains in the clear August light, yet they passed over without being noticed, descending slowly down the far side of the mountain through the ever-lengthening shadows from the setting sun to the hospitality of a friendly farmhouse.

A Queensland officer had this to say about the escape of de Wet across the Magaliesberg: 'He crossed the Magaliesberg by a bridle path which our people had not held. I had crossed this path alone with despatches for French on the day we entered Pretoria, and though it was generally considered impassable, I on more than one occasion reported that a regiment could easily cross there in single file, and with very little delay.'

The end of the long exhausting chase after de Wet found the various corps, comprising no less than 25,000 men, arriving at Elands River Post travel-stained by contact with the dusty veldt, with uniforms in a tattered condition and feeling the effects of the long marches. One infantry brigade had spent 40 out of 48 hours on the march. Another took 125 hours to trudge 115 miles. A column of Yeomen rode 81 miles in 59 hours, including action on the way. In addition the troops had marched for some time on quarter rations, with very little water. The stores at Elands River, however, were now more than sufficient to feed them all.

At the end of two days stay at Elands River, Kitchener left for Pretoria with every available wagon packed to capacity, his wagons lumbering along the road through Rustenburg. The remaining stores were loaded on the wagons brought by Lord Methuen from Magato Nek late on the afternoon of 18 August.

While the final preparations were taking place to vacate Elands River Post a three-man patrol from 'E' Squadron, New South Wales Mounted Rifles — Captain Dove, Lance-Corporal A. D. Wallace and Trooper W. M. Moore — was sent to scout in the direction of Marico River. Setting out in the morning they rode for 20 miles in what was for them new country. Although seen by roving bands of the enemy, they avoided farmhouses and eluded pursuit. At midnight one rider was sent back by the road to report. Captain Dove and the other trooper rode on scouting along the river banks. After two hours they turned back.

Pressing on they managed to reach Elands River Post soon after dawn, one hour after the return of the lone rider. Such was the general condition of the horses following the long chase after de Wet that, of five horses taken on the patrol, two died on the march and two had to be destroyed after arriving back at the camp.

With a record of meritorious service as a lieutenant, Dove was promoted to captain and assumed command of 'E' Squadron, New South Wales Mounted Rifles on 13 June 1900 when Captain Holmes was wounded and invalided home after Diamond Hill. On 25 August 1900 Lieut-Colonel De Lisle brought to the notice of Lord Roberts the outstanding services of Captain Dove: 'On numerous occasions he has volunteered for dangerous undertakings at night. He is a wonderful scout, and on no single occasion has he failed to accomplish his objective, nor has he lost a man accompanying him.' Dove was mentioned in despatches on 16 April 1901 and awarded the DSO. In 1902 he served with the Third Battalion Australian Commonwealth Horse.

The stores that could not be removed from the camp were burnt. The Bushmen loaded themselves up with flour and everything they could comfortably carry. On Sunday 19 August Methuen's column began to stretch out along the road towards Marico River. Forming a line ten miles long the troops travelled in heat made worse by clouds of dust hanging so thickly over the road that breathing became difficult. For this reason the men on foot were allowed to leave the road and march on the uneven veldt. Because they had no horses the Bushmen were forced to march with the infantry, a testing hardship indeed coming right after the siege. The Bushmen, essentially horsemen, liked walking no more than the Boers. The column rested for a day at Marico River before moving on, constantly pestered by snipers. The Bushmen tramped 85 miles through Zeerust and Ottoshoop before settling into camp at Mafeking on 28 August 1900.

During the halt at Marico River two Victorians borrowed horses and rode out to inspect a small irrigation plant, calling in on the way back to buy bread. They were received in a friendly manner by women whose menfolk were away on commando. Some time was passed pleasantly enough. While the women served coffee, one of the Victorians played hymns on a small organ. When the men prepared to leave by the back door where the horses were standing, the women politely insisted that they should take their departure from the front door. As soon as they appeared in front of the house a sharp volley came from Boers waiting in ambush. One trooper fell wounded in four places. His companion fled back to the camp. The ambulance corps found two wounded men in the house, the second man being a Yeoman. This soldier had lain wounded in a back room throughout the visit of the Victorians, under the threat of being shot should the visitors be made aware of his presence.

The Imperial Bushmen, after having gone into action for the first time with Carrington in the advance to Elands River Post and the subsequent retreat to Mafeking, were not slow to write about these events. On 9 August Corporal Victor Roberts wrote to his father at Lane Cove, Sydney: 'From Mafeking which we left on 1 August we went to Elands River, where the NSW Bushmen and some others were surrounded by the Boers, and tried to relieve them on a Sunday, but we got it plenty warm. The enemy had too many big guns for our 15-pounders and pom-poms. "A" Squadron was under a hail of bullets for a long time, but only one man was hit. When we got to camp we found that 10 of "E" Squadron had been cut off. Eight of them have since turned up. Trooper Albert Abbott of "D" Squadron was captured and they put two guards over him. One went to sleep, and he choked the other and then escaped. Bert Doney has been doing some cool things. He took two Boer prisoners and slept in one of their uncle's houses all night with them, and was nearly shot by our fellows in mistake when they came up in the morning.' Two days later Corporal Roberts added a post-script: 'We are now back in Mafeking.'

Lance-Corporal E. O. H. Doney, 'A' Squadron New South Wales Imperial Bushmen, was severely wounded near Ottoshoop on 23 August; he was mentioned in despatches on 30 August 1900.

Lieutenant A. C. M. Gould, serving with 'F' Squadron, wrote from Ottoshoop: 'I suppose you have seen by this time about our engagement at Elands River. We attacked them on Sunday (I think it was about the 6th). After fighting all day we had to retire. Then on the Monday they attacked the camp, and we made a running fight of it. This lasted all day. We had a rough time of it. Started off from camp on Sunday about four o'clock in the morning, riding all day long excepting when we had to fire or attack any place. No dinner or tea. When we had to retire we made a forced march and

were riding until past one the next morning (Monday), fed horses and lay down to sleep. Up again four o'clock, and in the saddle from five, all day until seven p.m. then some tea and bully beef and two biscuits. We saddled up a little after eight o'clock and were off to Zeerust.

'It was a quarter to four on Tuesday morning before we reached camp, and that without a halt all the way. The horses and men were knocked up. Every man Jack of us went to sleep in the saddle time after time, and would wake up with a start. I myself saw about 20 men fall off their horses, so you can see we did not have an easy time of it. I had my horse shot under me on Sunday, and on Monday had two bullets through my haversack. We had a little fighting back to this place and then returned to Mafeking.'

On 13 August Lieutenant J. E. Westgarth wrote to his father in New South Wales from Mafeking. His information regarding the situation at Elands River was the same as was commonly held at the time by General Carrington and his staff: 'There were 300 men taken prisoner at Elands River, 100 were NSW Bushmen. Among those captured were Captain Thomas, Lieutenants Cope, Zouch, Cornwall, and the Reverend James Green. They were surrounded by the enemy, water supply cut off, and forced to surrender.'

Although troubled by snipers from Marico to within two miles of Zeerust, General Carrington returned to that town after four days absence with his column of 60 wagons and his force intact, apart from the fact that 17 of them had been wounded.

Having gathered an exaggerated notion of the Boer strength Carrington ordered an immediate general withdrawal from Zeerust. In doing so he overruled Lord Edward Cecil, the District Administrator, appointed by Baden-Powell several months earlier, who declared that even though the enemy was harassing the outposts the well-provisioned and garrisoned town could be held. Carrington withdrew through Ottoshoop to Mafeking. Before leaving Zeerust Carrington ordered the hurried burning of great quantities of food and clothing, much of which the Boers were able to salvage. His convoy consisted of 180 wagons loaded with stores, 20 guns and a force of 2,000 men. The Boers followed the convoys most of the way to Mafeking.

Soon after his arrival in Mafeking on 10 August orders came for Carrington to return to Zeerust. He set out again on 14 August, but the advance came to a halt in the neighbourhood of Ottoshoop, a village 14 miles inside the western Transvaal border and 24 miles north east of Mafeking on the road to Rustenburg and Pretoria, where some sharp fighting took place over the next two weeks.

On 16 and 17 August the battle of Buffels Hoek took place a few miles from Ottoshoop, where General Lemmer held a strong position on kopjes along a 2 to 3 miles front. On the morning of 16 August the 1st Brigade made up of Imperial Bushmen, Paget's Horse, the New Zealand Rough Riders, a

New Zealand battery and a battery of Royal Field Artillery, attacked the Boer left. Trooper T. W. Dewson, an Imperial Bushman, said: 'Our boys were ordered to take a kopje with the bayonet. We galloped to within 500 yards of the Boers and then dismounted. The Boers turned a Maxim gun on us. It seemed to rain lead for a few minutes. Then Captain Baker said: "Now boys fix bayonets and charge." Such a shout was raised as we charged. We took the position and 36 Boers were brought from the kopje next morning.'

At 2 o'clock a squadron of New Zealand Rough Riders, reinforced by a small detachment of Bushmen, rode in to attack. Dismounting under the cover of a green-bushed kopje, they advanced half a mile beyond to a brown-faced kopje that came to be known as Lemmer's Hill. Undeterred by a patch of swampy ground, the New Zealanders moved towards the base of the kopje as eagerly as though they were following the ball on a rugby field. The burghers withheld their fire until the Kiwis came within 50 yards of the crest of the kopje, but soon turned and fled before the vigour of the bayonet charge across the flat top of the hill. The New Zealand casualties included two officers — Captain Harvey shot dead, and Captain Fulton severely wounded.

Meanwhile the New Zealand battery from 2,300 yards dropped shrapnel on entrenchments on a kopje away to the Boers' extreme right, allowing troops who had been suffering from severe enemy cross-fire to turn stiff rifle fire on this kopje. The whole of the Boer right wing soon weakened, so that by dusk the colonials were preparing to sleep on the positions they had won. On Lemmer's Hill after the Boers had set fire to the undergrowth, the New Zealanders laid themselves down for the night against nothing better than tough, sooty tussocks of grass — scant comfort on a cold night without blankets. Next morning the enemy counter-attacked, only to be repulsed by mid-afternoon. The British lost altogether 50 killed, wounded or missing. Two days later on 19 August at Malmani, five miles from Ottoshoop, patrols of Australians and New Zealanders working together drove off a Boer force and destroyed a flour mill.

Lieutenant A. G. Gilpin, a Victorian Imperial Bushman, writing from Ottoshoop on Sunday 19 August said: 'We have got into the fighting in real earnest now. We had a big battle on Thursday the 16th. The 1st Brigade is under General Carrington. Our direct commanding officer is Lord Erroll who has taken a great fancy to our men, and gave us pride of position. We had to take the first position. I was sent with my troop (22 men) and a troop of NSW Imperial Bushmen (26) including two officers. We went at full gallop across the open under a very hot fire, and all the troops in the rear gave us a great cheer. The bullets were ranging all around us. We took the position and the Boers retired to the next ridge. We only had one man shot, Trooper "Fred" Gibson. The poor fellow lived about two hours. We also

lost one horse. It was a good position and we held it for five hours under fire.

'Then the whole 2,000 of us advanced, and I formed the first line. We fought hard all day. We charged a big kopje about five o'clock. The New Zealand captain was shot through the head just near me, and 12 others were wounded. The total number of Boers killed was as near as we could guess about 68, and our loss we don't know yet. We had nothing to eat from 4 a.m. to 7 p.m. and when we (about 45 men and four officers) occupied a Boer farm, where we commandeered about 30 fowls and ducks, and a lot of bread and bacon, we had a good feed. Our rations had been reduced to $\frac{3}{4}$ lb of meat and two biscuits per day. But when we go out scouting we get plenty of good stuff.'

Lieutenant Gilpin again came under fire all day on 20 August. At 4.30 in the afternoon he left his position accompanied by Mr Rail, the correspondent for the London *Times*, to find a site for a pom-pom. On the way back Gilpin was hit. He was shot again as Mr Rail lifted him up and died instantly. Trooper J. B. Burke ran out and helped drag his body back within the lines. Two weeks after setting out from Mafeking the troops entered Zeerust once again.

On 1 September General Carrington left for Bulawayo to supervise the movement of the troops passing through Rhodesia from Beira. He had been widely blamed for the hasty full-scale withdrawal from Zeerust, a decision that riled his own troops including the Australians. Trooper Ronald McInnis, a Tasmanian Bushman, commented: 'Carrington had earned an unenviable reputation among the men under his command.' The retreat to Mafeking he described as 'something no Australian who took part will ever forget'.

CHAPTER 17

A new pattern of war

By September a new pattern of war was well in the process of being established. In the former Republics, which by this time had been proclaimed British territory by Lord Roberts, small bands of burghers roamed, keeping out of the way of large bodies of troops but always capable of swelling into a commando of a 1,000 or more whenever there seemed some favourable opportunity of pouncing on a small body of soldiers or some weakly-garrisoned town, convoy, camp, or section of the railway.

When General de Wet made good his escape from the Magaliesberg district by returning to the Free State, he immediately began with great energy to rekindle the spirit of resistance there. 'It was now,' he wrote, 'that I conceived the great plan of bringing under arms all burghers who had laid down their weapons, and taken the oath of neutrality, and of sending them to operate in every part of the State.'¹

The fact was that, with the elusive de Wet and President Steyn in the Free State, the resourceful De la Rey in the western Transvaal and Louis Botha and Viljoen in the eastern Transvaal all strongly active, the hopes that Roberts

¹ C. R. de Wet, *Three Years War*, p. 199.

had held after the fall of Pretoria some months earlier were not being realised. In a despatch to the War Office from Pretoria, dated 10 October 1900, Roberts said: 'Subsequent to the occupation of Johannesburg the organised forces of the enemy were materially reduced in numbers, many of the burghers in arms against us returning to their farms, surrendering their rifles, and voluntarily taking the oath of neutrality. But the submission only proved real when the burghers were protected from outside interference by the actual presence of troops. Whenever a Boer commando has traversed a district, the inhabitants of which had ostensibly resumed their peaceful vocations, a considerable part of the male population again joined the enemy and engaged in active hostilities. In some cases it has been reported that arms were only resumed with reluctance, and after some pressure has been placed upon them by the Boer Commandants or Field-Cornets concerned. The numbers who retained their oath was not sufficient to influence the general situation.'² Nevertheless by scattering the Boer armies while taking all the principal towns and holding all the lines of communication, Roberts established a situation from which the Boers could not win as they had become an army without a base.

In the beginning they had stood on British territory poised ready to drive the soldiers into the sea but one year later they found themselves pushed right out of the British colonies. Moreover, from this time on, the burghers were to become increasingly hunted and harried in their own country. Now they began to feel the full burden of the war as the countryside deteriorated, farms were laid waste and few crops were sown. In this situation the Republican forces found themselves entirely cut off from every seaport, and from communication with overseas countries. With the British Navy in full control of the sea approaches, no opportunity remained to get aid from the world outside.

Addressing troops in Pretoria on 13 October Roberts said: 'As you know the war is over. There are no more great battles to be won. No more large towns to be taken. The war has degenerated into a guerilla warfare, which is the most annoying part of any campaign.'

With the Boer army appearing no more in the open field in force, and with numbers of burghers constantly drifting back temporarily to the farms, it was often impossible for the soldiers to distinguish between a peaceful pastoralist and a burgher under arms.

To the commandos, with their intimate knowledge of the country, every kopje became a temporary fort and every faint mountain bridle path a possible escape route. More than ever they relied for assistance on the farms, so

that almost every farmhouse became a base to be used either as a refuge or as a source of intelligence, as a store for food or even as a small arsenal. The British found that operating in such a hostile countryside usually meant that their movements were known well ahead from information provided by farmhouses flying the white flag of neutrality.

'Banjo' Paterson reported in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 14 September 1900 that a state of affairs existed whereby: 'People who know the facts are of the opinion that no Boers should be left on the farms till the war is over. Even if the farmers did not wish to fight any more, the first commando that came along would make them come out and fight. His officers (Lord Roberts) have been instructed to conciliate the people whenever possible, but so far his efforts at leniency have only been laughed at and abused by the Boers, who have gone back to the laagers with English passes in their pockets and begun shooting at the British.'

Roberts tried to deal with the problem by ordering the burning of all farmhouses, the seizing of wagons and live stock and the destruction of crops around farmhouses known to have been used by the guerillas or situated near damaged sections of railways or along telegraph routes. Botha also claimed the right to burn farmhouses. In a circular sent to Landdrosts in the eastern Transvaal he threatened to burn the farmhouse of burghers who laid down their arms.

The nature of the war now gaining emphasis is well illustrated by an incident at the Molopo River near Ottoshoop on 17 October, when a New South Wales patrol was ambushed while riding up to a farmhouse to enquire for concealed weapons. A large white sheet, the symbol of neutrality, hung over the doorway. As the patrol approached, a woman suddenly appeared in front of the doorway and quickly pulled the sheet away. As she did so, burghers waiting inside the house poured out a sharp volley, killing Trooper G. T. Cooper and wounding Troopers Albert Beaumont and H. A. Perrott.

Captain H. H. Brown, 'E' Squadron, Imperial Bushmen, wrote from Ottoshoop on 28 August: 'During the last few days a new proclamation has been issued, warning the Boer that their property will be destroyed if they are found in arms. The necessity for something of this kind will be fully appreciated when I state that it is a common thing for the wily Boer to go out into a kopje and, unseen, pot at a wandering patrol all the week and return to his untouched farm and family on Saturday evening leaving again for another few days war as it pleases him. Of course he does not bring his rifle home. This he carefully conceals. Should the home receive a visitation, he becomes a harmless farmer who wishes the war was over, "and would like a pass".'

'The Boer women light the signal fires and send due notice of our presence. The nature of the country round here lends itself peculiarly to the Boer

² *South Africa Despatches, 6th February 1900-23 June 1902.* (Library of New South Wales number Q355.4868.)

methods. We have to advance over rocky country, while the unseen enemy calmly fires on us. Should we rush the kopje from the front he scampers away in the rear, covered by Boers in another kopje. When we succeed in getting round him he blazes away at us until we get within a short distance. Then when he sees escape is hopeless he hoists the white flag.

'In my opinion the only way of speedily terminating the war is to declare the whole district, when they are found in arms, as rebel districts, destroy the farms and commandeer the cattle. The want of supplies would speedily bring them into submission. As soon as we leave the district some of the Boer leaders appear and give the Boers the option of joining the commandos or being shot if they refuse. As in some cases they had no option, they are obliged again to take up arms against us. Thus we have a larger force opposed to us in a district where a few weeks ago it was supposed to be quite unarmed.'

Trooper James Rawling, 'C' Squadron, New South Wales Imperial Bushmen, wrote: 'The patrol work is worse than a big battle, for one never knows from what house or kopje he is going to be shot at. Any house we are shot at from is soon burned down. On Saturday last we burned down 11 houses.'

From Ottoshoop on 9 September Lieut-Colonel N. W. Kelly, commanding the Victorian Imperial Bushmen, wrote: 'We have killed a good many Boers and taken a lot of prisoners. If a shot comes from the vicinity of a house, be it large or small, we immediately swoop down, burn it and level everything to the ground. And this, of course, is having a beneficial effect on the snipers, whom we hate, and for whom we have no mercy. The rest of the Boers are rather decent fellows. There are three divisions here under General Lord Methuen, one under General Douglas, and one under General the Earl of Erroll. We belong to General Erroll's column.'

'I write this as I don't know when I will get another chance, as they think nothing of keeping us 24 hours in the saddle, and the extraordinary thing is that it seems to agree with us, but the horses take a lot of nursing. We had one horse shot yesterday. The bullet passed right under one eye and out an inch under the other, and he has not taken the slightest notice of it, but takes his feed and works as well as ever.'

On 13 September Captain S. G. Hubbe, commanding officer of the South Australian Bushmen, was killed near Ottoshoop. He was shot through the heart by a stray bullet from a distance of 2,000 yards as he rode to reform his squadron just as dusk was falling. Captain Hubbe was 52 years of age. A fellow officer wrote to his wife on behalf of the corps: 'After taking a kopje and holding it under fire the order was received to retire. Hubbe followed in the rear to give any assistance needed, and brought back on his saddle a trooper who had given up his saddle to an injured mate. At a distance of comparative safety Hubbe was checking his squadron to make certain none

were missing, when he was hit by a stray bullet in the heart. He was buried in the little cemetery at Malmani, where we will erect a headstone.'

The operations of the Australians in the western Transvaal at this time were also described by Trooper James Munro, New South Wales Imperial Bushmen, in a letter dated 26 October: 'They shift from hill to hill, leaving six or seven men to fire as we advance, allowing the convoys to get ahead and delaying us. We have to sit on our horses and grin at their bullets as they whistle about, till we get a gun on them, when they scuffle off to another place, and do the same tricks again. We go after them for all we are worth and give them a fair run, generally winding up by capturing a convoy of 18 or 20 wagons, cattle or prisoners, while the bulk get away. But this cannot last forever as we are too strong, and know a bit more than they do. Our Bushmen are either with Douglas or Erroll, and we of "D" Squadron with Lord Methuen, and a splendid man he is to be under.'

'We are at present camped in a beautiful spot — Lemmer's Farm. It is a fine undulating grazing area with orchards of oranges, lemons, walnuts and such like. In the roof of the farm we got a Maxim gun and a lot of ammo. The Boers have tucker, guns and ammo planted in all the hills and as we collar one lot they turn up somewhere else with a fresh batch, showing they must have been preparing for years for this sort of thing.'

'Three of us taking a stroll one evening called at a Boer's house for a bit of fun, and looking in saw a coffin on the table and a couple of women standing by it. They said the coffin was for their mother, but there were five men armed to the teeth in the next room. They had a small mule team and wagon outside, and the coffin proved to be full of ammo. They could have shot us easily, but were afraid of the report of the guns. We took the lot into camp.'

Towards the end of October de Wet returned to the Transvaal, bent on attacking Major-General Barton's column at Frederikstad near Potchefstroom. At the end of several days fighting he retired from the scene before the approach of a relief force, having incurred losses by his lack of success.

The relief force, led by Major-General C. E. Knox, hung on to de Wet's trail, overtaking him two days later on 27 October at Rensburg Drift on the river Vaal. Although de Wet's rearguard suffered, losing two guns, eight wagons and 20 men killed, wounded or taken prisoner, the main column got away lost in the gloom before a blinding rain and thunder storm right on nightfall. Captain W. W. R. Watson, serving with the New South Wales Mounted Rifles, attached to Colonel De Lisle's Mounted Infantry, gave a descriptive account of the action:

'From Essensbosch, near Vilkopjes, Kroonstad district, 28 October 1900. Since writing my last, have covered another 200 miles, have experienced the sensation of again following an enemy in headlong retreat and confusion.'

'On the 24th of this month information came in that General Barton was

held up in Frederikstad, north-east of Potchefstroom. During the afternoon we received orders direct from Kitchener to move to his relief. We went to operate with the colonial division, which was on our right flank moving across upper Schoeman's Drift on the Vaal, while we crossed at the lower de Wet's Drift. Colonel Le Gallais (whose galloper I used to ride on the march to Bloemfontein) was coming in support of us a day's march behind.

'We left Vilkopjes, south of Vredefort, on the afternoon of the 24th and moved almost due west; camped at the farm of Vlakfontein about 10 miles south of de Wet's Drift, crossing the drift next day about midday without opposition and marched 12 miles further towards Potchefstroom. Here we waited for the colonial division (by the colonial division I mean a division of troops raised in South Africa).

'They came up to us at 4.30 and we moved about six miles nearer Potchefstroom. The horses had been going since 4 a.m. As we bivouacked for the night orders came to go on at 2 a.m. We moved four miles towards the colonials, picking them up a couple of miles from the town. There we learnt that Barton had been relieved and that the Boers had lost something like 200 either killed, wounded or prisoners. Some of them came hurrying back to Potchefstroom. These were promptly bagged and handed over to the intelligence officer to gain all the information he could from them. We camped at Potchefstroom in the evening of the 26th and marched next morning in hot chase of de Wet, who had doubled back to get into his favourite hills about Parys again.

'About noon we picked up his spoor, and soon the NSW Mounted Rifles showed signs that they were close on the scent. The manner in which they scouted and cleared this most difficult country was described by General Knox as quite artistic. Our brave comrades of the 6th Mounted Infantry (the galloping 6th our boys call them) and the West Australian first contingent shared equally with us in maintaining the road for the main body to pass through.

'We had never been through this particular part before, and could not recognise from the west the kopjes we used to gaze upon from the east when sitting outside Parys and Vredefort two months before. On the skyline on either hand could be seen the observation posts of khaki clad objects, as we of the staff and the main body could ride along and admire our boys scaling height after height and signalling back that all was clear. Imagine our feelings when the news that NSW had captured their first gun came round. Everybody seemed cheered up, and on we pushed with renewed vigour, for we knew that if we were pressing so hard as to necessitate the enemy deserting their guns, they could not be far off. Soon we were rewarded for as the advanced scouts under Colonel Knight — Dove and Bennett, and the others — approached Rensburg Drift on 27 October they came in full

view of the Boer laager, just across the Vaal, 2,000 yards away. A hum of excitement ran from front to rear, and everybody passed the word for more men and the main body to come up at the gallop.

'The first intimation the Boers had of our actual presence was Stirling's pom-pom pumping into them as quick as he could loose them off; refer to Holmes for the sensation of pom-pom fire. A few minutes later and Lamont of "R" Battery (attached to De Lisle's force) came into action, and oh, what a score! The Boers numbering about 1,000 scampered off in every direction. Some ran up the river and some down. Some for Vredefort to the south, and the majority to the open plain towards the railway. Words cannot describe the scene. It was a wild mad rush of *sauve-qui-peut*, and the devil help the hindmost.

'Colonel De Lisle was at the very front all the time, and with soldierly instinct which he possesses to the full, promptly issued orders for what available troops were up, to push across to the left and right, to cut off their retreat, and soon we had two streams of men fording the Vaal, and the enemy in front in retreat before them. Suddenly we heard a gun to the south, and it was not till afterwards that we learnt that Le Gallais too had come back and was now right into them as they made their way to Vredefort. This was a surprise to us and the enemy, but hailed with very different degrees of enthusiasm. Colonel Le Gallais got another of their guns, and just at sunset put a shell right into an ammunition wagon, which made a tremendous flash and a roar as it exploded. At this our boys could not suppress a cheer as they flew along after our slim foes, who we were fast losing as the darkness approached. For we had left Potchefstroom at 4 a.m. 28 October and were now on the east side of Parys and Vredefort, a march of 30 miles by the road we travelled.

'Our horses were tired, theirs comparatively fresh, so we had to give up the chase until daybreak, the Boers having scattered in every conceivable direction. "Well done old NSW. Good Boys Australia," were the words which greeted us from all sides, and all shared in our pride. The result of the action was two guns captured in addition to four wagons with ammunition, stores and kit, and several prisoners, one a rather important catch by Lieutenant Dove — a Lieutenant Wessels of Theron's Scouts, and four others of the same regiment.

'And now to find our bivouac. 'Twas now pitch dark, and soon an awful thunderstorm came up. Orders were passed that camp was to be at a certain kopje, between Parys and Vredefort, near the bend of the Vaal, so we all tried to make for it. But the darkness and rain prevented us from finding the drifts or the spruits, so now it came to our turn for everyone for himself and God help the man without an overcoat. It simply poured and everyone was wet to the skin. I saw a fire started by the explosion on the wagon, and made

for it. Colonel De Lisle was there and away we started for camp. We found where it ought to have been, but no corps, so with a few men, Dove and [F. L.] Learmouth, we off-saddled our tired and half-starved horses and lay down on a kopje with nothing but an overcoat as covering and fell asleep, drenched to the skin. And so ended one of our proudest days since we landed.

'Next morning of course, although stiff and weary, we were all full of fight and anxious to keep them moving, but our General with a shake of the head, thought of our convoy we had left across the river, and issued orders that we were to wait until it crossed. This damped all chances of close pursuit, so we settled down to eat and sleep, both of which we had well earned.

'At Colonel De Lisle's suggestion General Knox had asked for permission for the NSW men to take their captured gun back to Sydney. It is a fine specimen of Krupp's best 12-pounder, "made in Germany" with the arms and motto of the Orange Uriegestaat engraved on the barrel. Truly a grand trophy for the brave lads to bring back with them. Today, the 29th, we marched towards the line in order to replenish our supplies. Our march today has been uneventful, and at the present time I am writing in our tent in the garden of the farm where de Wet himself used to live. It is about three miles from Rhenoster station where we are able to obtain our supplies. It is quite apparent that the Boers do not intend to fight any serious engagements again but simply to roam about the country, doing all the mischief they can, and attacking small forces when they have every advantage, and little risk to run.'

On 6 November 1900 patrols from the column led by Lieut-Colonel P. W. J. Le Gallais, a British officer, caught de Wet's laager unawares by capturing sleeping Boer pickets at 5.30 a.m. outside Doorn Kraal Farm near Bothaville. De Wet and President Steyn with a few burghers got clean away by jumping on the first horse they could find. The rest made such a spirited defence inside the low walls of the farm garden that the soldiers numbering 170 found themselves hard pressed.

From some miles away Knox sent De Lisle with the New South Wales Mounted Rifles, under Colonel Knight the West Australian Mounted Infantry and the 6th Mounted Infantry galloping to the scene at the fastest pace they could muster. The action ended when the 6th Mounted Infantry and the West Australians under Lieutenant H. F. Darling charged with the bayonet. At 9.30 a.m. the Boers hoisted the white flag and 131 prisoners were taken. The British lost 38 killed and wounded. Lieut-Colonel Le Gallais died the same evening from wounds received at the farmhouse immediately after it fell into the hands of the British.

In this fight de Wet's commando was completely smashed. He lost everything — guns, wagons and all but a handful of his men. But the most important factor remained unchanged. Christiaan de Wet was still at large. By moving south he quickly collected a commando of 1,500 burghers and

within a few weeks took the town of Dewetsdorp by forcing the surrender of a garrison of 450 men.

In mid-August 1900 the Bushmen from the Rustenburg district under Baden-Powell moved away from Commando Nek penetrating to Warm Bad, 62 miles north of Pretoria along the railway to Pietersburg. From there patrols made almost daily contact with the enemy, locating their outposts, ascertaining their strength, and rounding up cattle and flocks.

On 1 September a party of Army Service Corps men under Major E. W. Brooke and escorted by a troop of Tasmanian Imperial Bushmen, commanded by Lieutenant G. G. E. Wylly, were foraging near Warm Bad when eight advanced scouts rode into an ambush in a rocky defile. Six of the men were hit at close range by the enemy concealed in thick scrub. The horses of Troopers Walker, W. J. Campbell and Henry Blackaby were shot from under them. Campbell had a lucky escape when a bullet exploded a cartridge after striking his bandolier, the bullet being turned in doing so. Sergeant George Shaw, Corporal E. S. Brown and Trooper Samuel Willoughby received wounds. Corporal Brown's brother, Trooper G. H. Brown, died of his wounds.

Major Brooke's horse bolted when he was hit. Trooper J. H. Bisdee brought Brooke in by riding towards him and getting him up on his horse, and then running alongside until they were almost clear of the Boer bullets. Bisdee then mounted behind Brooke and rode with the wounded officer out of danger.

Corporal E. S. Brown, another of the wounded and horseless men, attracted the attention of Lieutenant Wylly. This officer succeeded in getting Brown up on his horse and then guided the horse away from the shooting. Settling himself behind a boulder, Wylly proceeded to cover the retreat of the party by single-handed rifle fire, until joined by Trooper F. A. Groom who had turned back. Groom was later awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal.

For valour that day in the northern Transvaal, in the face of the enemy, the two Tasmanians, Lieutenant Wylly and Trooper Bisdee, were awarded the Victoria Cross. Lieutenant Wylly later visited London and received his decoration from King Edward VII at St James's Palace.

By October the Australians were scattered throughout the length and breadth of the war zones. After resting and refitting at Mafeking, the men from Elands River travelled by train beyond Kimberley to De Aar, thence to Pretoria through Colesburg and Bloemfontein. The Reverend James Green, the padre who went through the siege, visited the wounded from Elands River in the General Hospital at the Wanderer's Ground at Johannesburg where the men were being looked after by Miss Ellen Gould and the Nursing Sisters from New South Wales.

Miss Rose Shappere, the Australian nurse who served throughout the siege of Ladysmith, had by this time returned to Johannesburg. Following the raising of the siege, Nurse Shappere tended the wounded on a troopship returning to England. She came back to South Africa and was attached to a military hospital in Johannesburg.

The Bushmen were inspected by Lord Roberts in the camp at Daspoort outside Pretoria. The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that Lieutenant A. E. M. Battye, the officer in charge of the regimental mascot 'Bushie' (officially presented in Sydney to the Citizens' Bushmen by the Lieutenant-Governor of New South Wales, on behalf of the Animals Protection Society), personally handed over the dog to Lord Roberts when permission to do so was given by Colonel Airey.

The majority of the Bushmen were now assembled at Pienaar's River, 40 miles north of Pretoria, under Major-General A. H. F. Paget and Brigadier-General Plumer. As a result of a calculated withdrawal from Warm Bad, the Pienaar's River post became the most northern position held by the army. The railway beyond, terminating at Pietersburg, was the only section of the railway system in the country not under British control.

A body of Bushmen built up from Tasmanians, South Australians, and 'D' Squadron, New South Wales Citizens' Bushmen, under Major A. B. Baker, remained in the Marico district attached to General Methuen, who had assumed command of the whole of the western Transvaal with Mafeking as a base. Methuen kept infantry garrisons at Ottoshoop, Zeerust and Lichtenburg. His mounted troops were kept busy escorting convoys and countering guerrilla movements.

At Pienaar's River Bushmen on long patrols were frequently in touch with the enemy. One patrol brought in 2,000 cattle with flocks of sheep and goats, the result of four days rounding up. The Bushmen discovered no less than four laagers mainly occupied by women, to which the burghers were constantly returning for supplies. One patrol made up of an officer and 20 troopers by waiting patiently in a laager gave unsuspecting returning burghers such a warm reception that they fled leaving their dead behind. Under instructions from Roberts, the women and children together with the stores were removed to Pretoria.

At the end of November 1900 Roberts sent General Paget to attack General Ben Viljoen who had been active along the Delagoa Bay railway. Paget took two infantry battalions, nine guns and 1,200 troopers in General Plumer's Mounted Brigade — Bushmen, New Zealanders and Yeomen. Viljoen with a numerically weaker force waited on a well-chosen, crescent-shaped line of kopjes away from which receded a gentle rolling open slope, 500 yards across.

Known generally as Rhenosterkop after the highest point on the southwest flank, the kopjes were several hundred feet high and covered with rocks

and small bushes. Situated about 20 miles north-east of Bronkhorstspuit and about 20 miles east of Pretoria, they were more prominent than any of the neighbouring hills. Deep ravines skirting the Boer position restricted the direction of Paget's attack.

The action opened at 4 a.m. on 29 November 1900, with a straight up infantry attack along the centre of the Boer front, across hundreds of yards of open grassy ground. The advance soon became bogged down before the hot fire from the Boer rifles. Captain R. C. Lewis, a Tasmanian Bushman, wrote: 'It was a grand sight to see the ordered columns marching to the attack.' On the left of the line the New Zealanders dismounted and went forward on foot to within 400 yards of the enemy position. Further to the left the dismounted Bushmen squadrons moved up to attack the right flank, supported by guns of the 38th Battery, Royal Field Artillery. The Bushmen soon found themselves pinned down in the open veldt under heavy rifle and pom-pom fire. On the enemy's extreme right flank the Bushmen managed to hold a rocky ridge. From there the rifle fire and deep intervening ravines prevented further progress. The colonials failed to dislodge the burghers at any point and were only just able to hold on.

The Boer guns were in well protected positions but the British gunners had difficulty in finding cover. At 11 a.m. the guns were unlimbered and dragged up below the crest of a ridge by hand. It was also hard to keep the shells up to the guns.

By 7.30 a.m. a deadlock extended along the whole battlefront of about four miles. The infantry could do nothing more than lie as flat as possible on the ground alongside the wounded in the hot sun. The 1st Battalion, West Riding Regiment suffered the most, losing their commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel G. Lloyd, when storming a kopje at the head of his men. With a smashed leg Colonel Lloyd nonchalantly leaned on his rifle, waving and urging the men on. Amid a hail of bullets he was hit twice more as the men were forced back. Captain Lewis described his action as 'a brave death but altogether pitiable'.³ Some months later, when Viljoen's commando passed by the scene of the battle, the burghers left flowers and a tribute on the grave 'in memory of a brave enemy'.

In some places only 500 yards separated the opposing rifle lines so that the water-carts were unable to get up near enough without the men moving back. Lieutenant A. A. Sale, a Tasmanian Bushman in charge of the escort to the guns on the right, 'made every man trim his hat with grass or leaves to make them less conspicuous'. The four-mile front remained static until night-fall. At 7 o'clock that evening General C. H. Muller launched a heavy but unsuccessful counter-attack on the New Zealand position lasting an hour. The New Zealanders had penetrated closer to the Boer lines than anyone else.

³ R. C. Lewis, *On the Veldt* (1902).

Trooper W. G. Davis, New South Wales Imperial Bushmen, wrote: 'When I was on outpost duty that night I found four New Zealanders shot dead. I covered up their faces with their hats to keep the glaring sun off them the next morning, until we could bury them.'

During the night the troops worked hard digging trenches to make the positions more secure, only to find next morning that the Boers had withdrawn from the field everywhere. At this stage of the war with no particular base to defend there seemed no good military reason why they should incur losses holding any position. Furthermore, their supply wagons were 18 miles away to the north-east.

The action at Rhenosterkop, although on a smaller scale, was similar to some of the earlier battles in Natal and during the advance of Lord Roberts. It proved to be the last pitched battle of its kind. The British casualties amounted to 85. Two medical officers, Captain Walter Gibson of Western Australia and Captain S. S. Dunn of South Australia, worked all day from the field hospital.

In a brigade order General Paget praised the troops for having forced the Boers 'to retire from a position of great natural strength, which it was most important they should not evacuate'.⁴ Captain Lewis gauged the outcome rather differently: 'In all we had about 150 casualties and apart from the fact that we eventually drove the Boers from their position, we did little good as far as I could see.'⁵ Captain D. J. Ham sent a telegram to the Victorian Minister of Defence: 'The Victorians were engaged for 14 hours and fought splendidly against big odds.'

Corporal David Lees, New South Wales Citizens' Bushmen, described the battle in a letter to his sister in Goulburn: 'Just as the light began to break we came upon the Boers, and no one knew till then the strong position they held. Volleys were fired from all sides and showers of lead ploughed the ground around. The New Zealand contingent came off worse than any, as 10 of them went down in the first volley. The West Australians were wounded and they had to lie in the hot sun the whole day within 30 yards of their comrades, for the Boer fire was so deadly that no one could move from where he was lying to go to the rescue of the wounded men. The British got 12 guns to the Boers, but they were in such a strong position that the attacking force could not move an inch in 12 hours fighting. On the open plain without shelter many of the men were compelled to lie on the ground so long that they nearly died for want of water.'

Captain Ham, a Victorian Bushman, also gave an account of the action: 'As we approached four strong kopjes, and when within 600 yards of them,

one of my men saw a Boer in the distance and fired at him. Immediately there came a hellish fire from the kopjes of the enemy, and I ordered the men about me to take cover. It was not necessary for me to give such an order, as each man and I instinctively fell flat on the ground. Here we were without no more cover than was afforded by the short veldt grass. To go forward meant the loss of many men, and to go backward meant the same; so here we stuck with the bullets spitting up the dust all round us, and every now and again the pom-pom of the enemy searched our line from end to end. The 38th Battery of Artillery came up and at once gave the enemy a shrapnel fire, which somewhat disconcerted them and decreased their fire on us. It was a terrible position for us to be in.

'[Lieutenant W. J. W.] Strong was on my left and [Lieutenant R.] Gartside on my right. After about five hours Gartside managed to work his men back to the rocks at our rear, and for 12 hours the Royal Artillery kept its shrapnel fire going, but the position was impregnable. We lay with the sun beating on our backs, and the bullets flying around if we moved hand or foot. It was a very hard time for all of us, as we had no water or anything to eat. The infantry was driven back no less than three times. At one period of the fight we were ordered to take the kopjes at all costs, but the officer who brought the message saw the difficult position we were in and explained to the General. After the Munsters had been repelled the third time we got the order to retire, but this was just as dangerous and we decided to hang on until dark. We repulsed two attempts by the enemy to roll up our flank.'

⁴ P. L. Murray (ed.), *Official Records of the Australian Military Contingents to the War in South Africa*, p. 464.

⁵ Lewis, *On the Veldt*.

CHAPTER 18

Kitchener's scorched earth policy

Lord Roberts laid down his command at midnight on 28 November 1900 and returned to England after announcing that the war was mainly over. His successor, General Kitchener, found himself immediately faced with problems accentuated by the new type of guerilla warfare still gathering momentum. To contend with the problem of the will-o'-the-wisp raiders he at once called for more mounted men. At the same time many of the experienced overseas colonial and Yeomanry troops were returning home at the end of 12 months enlisted service.

In the Australian cities the returned soldiers were welcomed proudly. In Melbourne on Saturday 5 January 1901 the parading contingents were given a magnificent reception by the crowds in the thronged streets. Only a week earlier, on New Year's Day, the former Colonies had become one nation, with the inauguration of the Commonwealth of Australia. The occasion was marked at the front by Australian troops in a position to do so. An Australian Commonwealth Banquet was held in Mafeking on New Year's Day. Australians in the town and representatives from the squadrons in the surrounding area attended. Lieut-Colonel N. W. Kelly of the Victorian Imperial Bushmen regiment presided at the function, and Lieut-Colonel E. T. Wallack of the Tasmanian Bushmen Contingent proposed the toast of the evening.

At a reception given in Sydney for the returned men the New South Wales Premier, Sir William Lyne, declared: 'Those men who fell at the front or by disease will never be forgotten.' In Sydney also the first Prime Minister of Australia, Mr Edmund Barton, told the returned soldiers that 'such deeds as the defence of Elands River were their possessions, and it should be the duty of Australia to acknowledge them'. In thanking the returned men in the name of 'United Australia', the Prime Minister concluded by saying that the honours they had won in South Africa were such that 'United Australia could never forget'.

In Western Australia an editorial in the *Western Mail*, headed 'Return of Our Soldiers', stated: 'All the Australian troops in the South African War have distinguished themselves. They have been foremost in fighting. They have been an invaluable scouting force for the English Army. At first they were used with some hesitation. The Imperial officers did not know their quality. They speedily found, however, that as mounted infantry and for scouting work the Australian has no superiors.'

In response to Kitchener's appeal, Australia and New Zealand enlisted additional mounted troops, many of the returned men joining up for the second time. In South Africa more colonial units were formed. From Great Britain 16,000 newly-raised Yeomen embarked. Many of the Yeomen were untrained. On arrival in South Africa they were not ready to go into the field. At first they were placed along the lines of communication to gain experience. On 8 July 1901 Kitchener reported to the War Office: 'It was impossible at first to put into the field a large number of new Yeomanry recruits, many of whom were unable to either ride or shoot.'¹ About this time a Bushman wrote: 'It is good fun to see the Imperial Yeomanry ride, as they fall off at the rate of one a minute.'²

In the refugee camps there were many surrendered Boers who considered that the continuation of hostilities on the part of the burghers in what they claimed to be a lost cause was no longer in the best interests of the country. These men formed a Burgher Peace Committee to confer with Kitchener. As a result, burghers still in the field were given the opportunity to surrender by bringing in with them their families and livestock. Kitchener promised to provide safe camps until the end of the war. At the same time he undertook either to provide for or purchase any livestock they brought with them. The movement failed and the Committee members who went out to attempt to persuade the Boers in the field met with rough treatment, many being fined and imprisoned or even flogged and, in one case according to an unsub-

¹ *South Africa Despatches*, 6th February 1900-23rd June 1902. (Library of New South Wales Q355.4868.)

² 4

² F. Wilkinson, *Australia at the Front: A Colonial View of the Boer War*, p. 286.

stantiated report, executed. There were certainly death sentences but these were not carried out.

In an attempt to reduce the sources of supply open to the commandos and so assist in hastening the end of the war, Kitchener adopted a proposal put forward by the Burgher Peace Committee. On the basis of military necessity he authorised the destruction of all crops, herds and farm buildings in the affected areas. In the view of Kitchener some families willingly helped the commandos, the others did so because they were intimidated. On the grounds of humanity the Refugee Camp system was extended to all destitute families. The families of the refugee Boers and of the fighting Boers were taken in and concentrated in the camps.

In a Despatch sent to the War Office on 8 March 1901, Kitchener reported: 'I some time ago took measures for the establishment of properly organized camps at certain selected sites on the lines of the railway, at which surrendered burghers were permitted to live with their families under our effective protection. The families of all burghers still under arms are, as far as possible, brought in from the adjacent districts and similarly lodged in these camps, the administration of which has recently been taken over by the civil authorities.'

Even so the claim to the right to burn farmhouses was not confined to one side. In a despatch received at the War Office on 28 December 1901, Kitchener referred to a circular sent by Botha to the Landdrosts, a copy of which came into the hands of military intelligence, and to a conversation he had had with Botha at the abortive peace discussions held at Middelburg in 1901. Kitchener wrote:

'Numerous complaints were made to me in the early part of this year by surrendered burghers, who stated that after they had laid down their arms their families were ill-treated, and their stock and property confiscated by order of the Commandant-General of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. These facts appear to have been taken in consequence of the circular dated Roos Senekal, 6 November 1900, in which the Commandant-General says: "Do everything in your power to prevent the burghers laying down their arms. I will be compelled if they do not listen to this to confiscate everything movable or immovable, and also to burn down their houses."

'I took occasion at my interview with Commandant-General Louis Botha to bring this matter before him, and told him that if he continued such acts, I should be forced to bring in all the women and children, and as much property as possible, to protect them from the acts of his burghers. I further enquired if he would agree to spare the farms of families of neutral or surrendered burghers; in which case I expressed my willingness to leave undisturbed the farms of families of burghers who were on commando, provided they did not actually assist their relatives. The Commandant-General

emphatically refused even to consider any such arrangements. He said: "I am entitled by law to force every man to join, and if they do not do so to confiscate their property and leave their families on the veldt."

I asked him what course I could pursue to protect surrendered burghers and their families, and he then said: "The only thing you can do is to send them out of the country, as if I catch them they must suffer." After this there was nothing more to be said and, as military operations do not permit of the protection of individuals, I had practically no choice but to continue my system of sweeping inhabitants of certain areas into the protection of my lines. My decision was conveyed to the Commandant-General in my official letter dated Pretoria, 16 April 1901, from which the following is an extract:

"As I informed your Honour at Middelburg, owing to the irregular manner in which you had conducted and continue to conduct hostilities, by forcing unwilling and peaceful inhabitants to join your commandos, a proceeding totally unauthorised by the recognised customs of war, I have no other course open to me and am forced to take the very unpleasant and repugnant steps of bringing in the women and children. I have the greatest sympathy for the suffering of these poor people which I have done my best to alleviate, and it is a matter of surprise to me and the whole civilised world that you consider yourself justified in still causing so much suffering to the people of the Transvaal by carrying on a hopeless and useless struggle."

Evidence that the practices relating to farm burning did not meet with the approval of every Australian is revealed in a letter written by Trooper H. P. Thompson of the Queensland Imperial Bushmen: 'We have been burning all the farmhouses, and every farm has women and children on it. We are heartily sick of the work, for when we do find any Boers our generals won't let us go and wipe them out. Nearly all the men out this way are colonials, and the generals will get a shock if we have to keep on burning houses over women and children. We don't mind burning a house if the Boers do any sniping out of it, but when it comes to burning where no sniping has taken place, we will mutiny one of these days and refuse to do it.'

On the other hand the reactions of Sergeant A. W. Coughlan, who had re-enlisted in the Fifth Victorian contingent, were rather different. On 27 May 1901, he wrote: 'It has been my painful duty to search a couple of houses, always a white flag flying, yet perhaps half an hour before, you have been fired at from that very spot, or out of those holes in the walls designed as windows. You ride up and are met on the step by a white-haired old woman, with two or three dark-eyed daughters, tears glistening through their heavy eye lashes. You open a box — almost always the same — letters, jewellery. Every action is repugnant to you. Then you reach the bottom, three or 400 cartridges, deadly soft nosed, and explosive dum-dums, and perhaps a Mauser. Always the same story, it never varies.'

'If your heart melts and you leave the house unsearched, it may seal your death warrant. A few hundred yards away — and the column perhaps a mile further off — and again that deadly crack. The burgher, whose white-haired old vrouws and innocent eyed girls have sworn by all that is sacred is dead or away, has come to life, and he cannot resist a parting shot so deadly is his hatred of the Rooinek. He can't resist even though you have spared his wife and children and their home. So after all, it is a very sad fact. There is nothing left but to burn and destroy what you can't take. The women and children are brought into camp, and from there sent to the many refugee camps.'

On 12 November 1900, Captain Ham, the commander of the Victorian Bushmen regiment attached to General Paget's force near Rustenburg, wrote describing the work of the Australians in farm clearing: 'Moving through country east of Rustenburg we took the Canadian guns with us, but we had no use for them, for the Boers cleared out before us, leaving their farms, wives and children to look after themselves. While one portion of our regiment was following them, I had the unpleasant task deputed to me of turning the women and children out of their houses and generally destroying the property.'

'I pitied the women and children who knelt before us and begged and prayed that their houses and food might not be destroyed, but it was an order, and my finer and humanitarian instincts had to be sacrificed, and I ordered Strong and Gartside to assist the women out with their clothes and not burn them, and to destroy all other property. Soon one of the most fertile valleys in the Transvaal was devastated, corn meal, hay, machinery etc. was destroyed, and we left that valley which a few hours previously had been of much value to the Boers, filled with smoke and flame, and homeless half-clad women and children. I am not going to pass any judgment on the policy of devastating the country. I obey orders, and perhaps it is a wise plan. Our men at least did not suffer although we were on half-rations, for they had geese, fowls etc. hung to their saddles, and some of them got a little mealie meal.'

'We moved across the valley at 4 a.m. and took up our camp on Eloff's farm, that is the Eloff who is the son-in-law of Kruger. We carried out the work of devastation in the valley also, which is also extremely fertile, and Eloff's farm is, or was, a picture. Eloff was taken prisoner some time ago. One of Kruger's sons (Jan) lives close by, and his homestead was destroyed, but Eloff's was to be protected. But a party of snipers had used the orange grove the day previous for cover from which they fired on our men, and so shrapnel had to be fired at the place, some of which fired the roof of the house. It was soon destroyed. (It was one of the best in the valley.) We camped on the farm that night.'

'It was reported that Eloff had 2,000 sovereigns planted in the orange grove somewhere, and our men soon had their bayonets to work, touching up any

suspicious spot. I passed two groups busy excavating and waited results. I got a lesson in Boer slyness that you would scarcely credit. One party unearthed several boxes of Mauser ammunition, and the other party struck a most elaborate coffin, with the plates on the cover, etc. At that moment Miss Eloff (who could speak English) appeared on the scene, and appealed to us not to disturb the coffin, as her grandmother was buried there. She appealed with such earnestness that I was inclined to make the men desist, but I ordered them to break the coffin open and chance it. We were staggered to find it contained all sorts of clothing, and other things such as opera cloaks. It was amusing to hear the men as they split the coffin up and pulled the things out one by one, saying to Miss Eloff, "Your grandmother must have cleared out and left the clothes."

Meanwhile as the guerilla warfare flared up, Botha and Viljoen in the eastern Transvaal dealt out telling blows against garrisons spread out along the Delagoa Bay railway. On 3 December 1900 De la Rey and Smuts smashed a convoy at Buffelspoort in the Magaliesberg area bound for Rustenburg, inflicting casualties and taking 75 prisoners. The convoy, a mile and a half long, consisted of 138 heavily laden wagons drawn by 1,800 oxen.

Ten days later De la Rey and General C. F. Beyers with 3,000 burghers launched a dawn attack on General Clements' force. Clements had been camped at Nooitgedacht, a farm at the base of the Magaliesberg Range between Hekpoort and Olifant's Nek, for the past four days. De la Rey and Beyers combined in a two-pronged attack. Moving with great determination, Beyers seized a defended point on a mountain, from whence his burghers descended a bridle path leading to the camp below. At the same time De la Rey also fell on the surprised camp. Fighting desperately, Clements managed to get the biggest part of his force away to Hekpoort, but the camp stores, the baggage and nearly 600 men, either killed, wounded or missing, fell to the Boers.

With the camp turned into a shambles, the New South Wales Army Medical Corps worked with a British medical corps among the dead and the wounded. Handicapped by the lack of sufficient supplies and transport, it was with great difficulty that the wounded were treated and moved to Pretoria. Captain T. M. Martin, Captain T. A. Green, Sergeant Thomas Sullivan and Lance-Corporal J. W. Taylor all served with the New South Wales unit. Lieutenant William Skene, a Victorian serving with Kitchener's Horse, was among those killed at Nooitgedacht.

After the fall of Dewetsdorp, de Wet planned a raid across the Orange River into the Cape Colony, with the hope of inspiring a general rebellion. Advancing to the river in December 1900 with troops close at his heels, he found a number of drifts blocked by soldiers waiting on the southern bank.

The heavy rain sweeping the country made others unfordable. De Wet therefore abandoned the intention of making a crossing. Notwithstanding the presence of troops ready at almost every point to intercept him, he managed at the price of losing most of his wagons and supplies to break back into the south-eastern corner of the Free State. At the same time two columns from the commando were successful in entering the Colony. On 16 December Commandant Kritzingen, with 700 followers, and Commandant Hertzog, with 1,200 men, crossed the river west of Colesberg, being gradually pushed further westward after doing so.

Undeterred by his first failure, and buoyed up by the optimistic reports filtering through from Hertzog and Kritzingen in the Cape Midlands, de Wet once again succeeded in eluding the impending British columns in a dash for the Orange River. On 10 February 1901 he crossed by Sand Drift, west of Philippolis, with about 1,400 burghers. Major-General Bruce Hamilton and Major-General Knox, at the head of columns riding hard behind, were delayed for several days on the north bank by heavy flood waters coming down the river. In heavy going caused by the soaking rain, de Wet set off to the west towards Philipstown with the idea of linking up with Kritzingen and Hertzog.

The Australian Bushmen and the New Zealanders under General Plumer were brought down from the Transvaal by train to Naauwpoort, the line having been especially cleared to send them through. At Naauwpoort the Bushmen went into camp with the 1st Dragoon Guards, just out from England with fine horses and eager to serve under Plumer. When the Bushmen caught sight of the Dragoon's horses the fine animals soon began to disappear from the Dragoon's lines one by one, their places being taken by the Bushmen's well-worn mounts. The displeasure of the Dragoons erupted into further trouble, when they found difficulty in identifying their horses again. For in the words of Captain R. C. Lewis: 'Give an Australian half-an-hour with a horse and tails are changed, manes are hogged, marks and brands disappear as if by magic.'

With the intention of obtaining supplies from Philipstown, de Wet sent 300 men riding by night to arrive outside the town at dawn on 12 February. On the same morning Plumer's force made first contact with de Wet at about midday, forcing him further north-west from Philipstown. A detachment of 40 Victorian Imperial Bushmen rode from De Aar to Philipstown where Yeomen were holding out in the town gaol. From a kopje on the outskirts of the town the Bushmen kept firing all day until the arrival of two squadrons of Victorians sent from De Aar forced the Boers to retire. For his part in the engagement Captain Edwin Tivey of the Fourth Imperial Bushmen's Contingent from Victoria received the DSO.

In drenching rain Plumer continued to follow de Wet. At Wolvekuil Kopjes on the 14th he forced de Wet to fight a rearguard action. When he

surrounded two squadrons of the Dragoon Guards, the Australians and New Zealanders attacking strongly caused de Wet to quit the position and continue his flight. The action cost the colonials 20 casualties. Major W. H. Tunbridge, the Queenslander who figured so prominently at Elands River, was mentioned in despatches by Kitchener for his part in the engagement. Lieutenant Robert Gartside, who commanded a forward post at Elands River, received a severe wound at Wolvekuil.

On the following day at Driekuilen, when operating apart from one another, Troopers Ernest Culliford, John Alford and J. H. Rule, all of the Fourth Queensland Imperial Bushmen, each captured single-handed three to four armed Boers. For this they were mentioned by Kitchener in his despatches and promoted to Corporal. Heavy rain storms delayed the pursuit, when horse teams and guns bogged down in the sloppy veldt, the horses at times being up to the knees in mud.

Trooper E. P. Molloy, a Victorian, described the chase after de Wet up to this stage: 'We reached Rensburg on 12 February 1901 and saw the graves of the Australians who fell there nearly a year ago. Then we chased de Wet, who with the British columns almost surrounding him was supposed to have no chance of escape. It seems strange that the first day we engaged him was on the anniversary of the Rensburg fight, in which Major Eddy fell only about 15 miles from the same spot. The Boers had taken up positions on the neighbouring kopjes and some shells had been fired at our advance party. Our regiment and the Third West Australians, commanded by Major Harry [H. G.] Vials of Western Australia, was ordered off to the left. We dismounted and lay behind a ridge out of sight of the enemy. The Queenslanders took up their position on the same ridge and commenced firing. We did nothing and began to think we were out of the fighting. After a couple of hours the Boers moved round to the left and swarmed in a lot of kopjes in front of us. There was danger of them getting at our horses and capturing two of our guns, so we were told to turn the Boer flank.

'We numbered only 70 in all and I thought half of us would be shot down. As it was only 10 were wounded. We raced for the kopjes and the fire of the whole of the other troops was concentrated on the ridge in front of us. With the roar of the shot over our heads it was like a foundry. Judging from the dust spurting up the Mauser bullets were flying about thickly. Two of my mates were wounded but not seriously. Lieutenant Gartside was wounded close beside me. The Boers had meant to stay where they were, for when we came up their clothes were hanging in front of the fires and the mutton was roasting. They cleared across the plain below us and scattered as our shrapnel exploded among them. Rain came on and although we pushed forward, we were unable to come up with them owing to the boggy nature of the ground and the flooded river. So once more de Wet escaped.'

Scouts hanging on to de Wet's trail discovered him heading for the railway at Bartmann's Siding, to the north of De Aar. By leaving a rearguard at the railway, de Wet got away under the cover of darkness skirting Hopetown on the west and heading north. The urgency of his flight forced him to jettison 40 wagons, a Maxim gun and ammunition. Thirty of his rearguard were taken prisoner. Three days later Plumer again succeeded in making contact with the enemy, with a spearhead of 150 Australians and Yeomen under Major Vials.

When de Wet saw them approaching in three separate parties of 50 men riding widely he mistook them for a large force. Having already taken some valuable time looking for a passage across swollen rivers, de Wet did not hesitate any longer. He at once gave up the idea of joining Hertzog near Prieska. By turning east he desperately sought a passage over the Orange River to return to the Free State. Near Saxon Drift on 21 February he was attacked by Captain J. K. Berry with 50 Queensland Bushmen whose horses had outstayed the rest of the column. On the following day, after oats and biscuits had run out, the Queenslanders were forced to return to the column.

In the meantime Kitchener had arrived at the base on the railway at De Aar to direct operations by telegraph and make use of the railway as much as possible in the movement of his columns. Valuable time was often lost in the intervals when contact was broken between headquarters and the column commanders in the field.

When Kitchener heard of de Wet's change of direction he spaced a cordon along the course of the Orange River between Orange River Station and Norval's Pont. Directly after Plumer's men dropped out of the race, with knocked up horses and supply problems, de Wet was followed closely by a column made up of Victorian Imperial Bushmen, the Imperial Light Horse and the King's Dragoons. On 23 February a British officer with three Victorian Bushmen, Troopers W. T. Sheehan, Percy O'Brien and James Green, rode down and captured two guns and teams near Read's Drift. The escorts fled. De Wet still kept three miles ahead. The troopers were mentioned in despatches for bravery by the Commander-in-Chief and promoted to corporal.

For 200 miles de Wet continued to skirt the river, trying drift after drift but unable to find a fordable crossing along the rain-swollen river. Finally, at dawn on 28 February he went across at Botha's Drift, between Sand Drift and Norval's Pont, 4 miles west of the Colesberg road bridge. It was the fifteenth drift he had tried since turning back.

De Wet had barely escaped from the Cape Colony to return to the Free State. In doing so he had lost most of his men and all his guns and transport. The failure of his mission ended whatever chance there may have been to foster a rising of the Cape Boers. While he had brilliantly eluded the British

columns, they had from the beginning allowed him no respite. At no place did he have any opportunity to stay and enlist support. The horses suffered severely. During the long gruelling chase both Briton and Boer left a trail of worn-out horses behind them. The soldiers went on short rations, the Victorians at one stage having no more than six army biscuits in six days. Fortunately meat was usually obtainable from the country. In the bad weather, in accompanying mud and slush, the Victorians rode 380 miles in 15 days. Major Vials reported to the General Officer Commanding in Victoria that the Victorian Bushmen formed two squadrons under his command: 'I wish to bring to the notice of the General Officer Commanding, the splendid conduct of the Victorian Bushmen under rough conditions, without tents, short rations, horses dead beat, and the country knee deep in mud and water. They treated the matter as a huge joke, and went for the enemy whenever they could get at him.' By this time Vials, a most popular officer, had been nick-named 'Old Biltong' by his men.

About half of Kitchener's force in the great chase suffered from inexperience, having recently arrived from England. Trooper John Cobb, a Bushman in Plumer's column chasing de Wet to Hopetown, had this to say: 'As for the crack Dragoons Guards, during our march after de Wet they were scattered all along the line of march. They are a fine lot of men, but too fresh for this kind of work. When they first joined us we took 40 of their horses, and they paraded before the General and said they wished to join some other column, as the Bushmen had stolen their horses. The General asked them if they had come here to fight, and when they replied, "Yes", he said: "Well come on with the Bushmen and they will show you how to fight and also how to look after yourselves." It is not often a Bushman is caught, and if he gets into a mess he generally manages to get out of it somehow and gets cover as quickly as a Boer.'

On 1 March a patrol of 15 Victorian Imperial Bushmen, under Captain Joseph Dallimore, trailed a party of Boer stragglers before they crossed the Orange River. Without revealing their presence the Bushmen followed the Boers until nightfall. Then they waited all night in drizzling rain on a ridge overlooking the Boer camp near the junction of the Orange and the Sea Cow Rivers. During the night three Bushmen quietly crawled in and led the burghers' horses away. At daybreak they surrounded the camp, firing over the heads of the awakened Boers who immediately turned for the horses. Taking cover wherever they could the Boers exchanged rifle fire. Then a Bushman went in with a white flag to inform the enemy that unless they surrendered, the Bushmen would open up with a big gun. The bluff succeeded. Thirty-three Boers were taken prisoner and 54 horses were seized. Captain Dallimore was awarded the DSO and Trooper H. E. Elliott received the DCM 'for particularly daring conduct'.

Christiaan de Wet had long since established himself as the outstanding guerilla leader by his skill in carrying out raids and his resource in fighting rearguard actions when on the run. In this way he played a big part in prolonging the war, though without a hope of altering the final outcome.

Among the colonial troops there existed the feeling that the army method of sending out columns that were continually directed by telegraphic orders from headquarters was not the best way to tackle the fast-moving commandos. Both the South African-raised regiments and the overseas colonials felt that within their ranks they had men either equally or sufficiently versed in the law of the veldt and bush as the Boers themselves; men capable of being formed into independent columns that could simply go out and match the Boers on the fastnesses of the veldt.

Major W. W. Dobbin, serving with the Victorian Bushmen, wrote to the Minister of Defence in that State: 'De Wet is now our main trouble, but if the Colonial troops were put together we would soon have him.' The Australians had various opinions on the prowess of de Wet. Lieutenant William McCulloch, a Victorian Bushman, wrote: 'We have had a good deal of fighting since I wrote last, when we were after de Wet and Co. He is a wonder, he has had all our generals after him, but he always beats them.'

According to Trooper Ronald McInnis, a Tasmanian: 'Some of us think de Wet a rather over-rated person. Of course he is a champion bolter and a first rate nuisance, but he hardly does more than any well-mounted leader with an intimate knowledge of the country might do in his own land. And to call a man a "great General" (as people do at home) who bolts when the first shot is fired is manifestly absurd.' Trooper L. J. Millar, a Victorian, writing about the prospects of catching de Wet, said: 'I don't think we will ever do so as long as we continue to leave stock at all farms which pretend to be loyal.'

With the intention of returning to Natal, Botha concentrated a force of 5,000 burghers in the wide range of country between the Delagoa Bay and Natal railways. The area had hitherto been practically unscathed by the war and the small towns of Ermelo, Bethal and Carolina in a district noted for crops and cattle continued to be important centres of supply for Botha's commandos. On 28 January 1901 an army of 14,000 first-line troops under General French, and attended by half as many again secondary troops, left a base near Springs with the objective of spreading out through the area and sweeping up everything within its path between the diverging railways.

The army progressed slowly meeting with little opposition in the field as it methodically eliminated sources of enemy supply, by burning farmhouses and crops, removing farm wagons and carts and destroying such installations as mills and bakeries. The women and children found on the farms were transported to the nearest railway. On 6 February French entered Ermelo,

having cleared the country behind him. Enormous quantities of grain and forage were either taken or destroyed. Nearly 200,000 rounds of rifle ammunition, almost 2,000 carts and wagons, more than 6,000 horses and 5,000 oxen were gathered in. The number of cattle and sheep totalled over 200,000.

With the drive in the eastern Transvaal well on the way as de Wet was being hunted on the run in Cape Colony, Kitchener decided that the time seemed opportune to initiate proposals that could end with a settlement of the war. So with the full knowledge of the Home Government, he contacted Botha making an offer to meet for discussions. When General De la Rey in the west heard of Kitchener's move he could not conceal his satisfaction, inspiring burghers when he proclaimed his mistaken belief to the assembled commando in ringing words: 'Men, believe me, the proud enemy is humbled.'

A circulated report sent to General Viljoen in the field read: 'Australia, India, Canada, and Cape Colony want to withdraw their troops owing to the great cost of the war.'

In response to a verbal message received on 13 February, Botha replied the same day with a request for safe conduct to and from Middelburg, where he suggested the meeting should take place. The Middelburg conference broke down because the Boers were not yet ready to sign away their independence. Botha insisted that the Republics should retain some form of independence. In a circular letter to his officers and burghers on 15 March he declared: 'The British Government desires nothing else but the destruction of our Afrikaner people.' At the same time he wrote: 'With regard to medicines, Lord Kitchener promised on receiving a list to be sent in by me, to supply them.'

General Louis Botha was then 36 years of age, and the British were impressed with him. Mr T. Milford, correspondent for the London *Daily Mail*, wrote: 'General Botha's personal appearance is most striking. A magnificent physique is topped by a countenance of singular expression of openness and charm. Never have I encountered a more winning personality, a quality which has greatly enhanced his influence with the independent spirits who comprise the Boer commandos. When the war is over, Botha will be a power for reconciliation.'

The drive by French in the eastern Transvaal continued until mid-April. From the beginning of February until the end of the third week in March his columns were immobile, bogged down on roads made almost impassable by heavy rain that also held back the arrival of supplies. For several weeks thousands of troops were on very short rations. As the army proceeded to fold up more farms, with the stock and crops, the commandos with the exception of attacking isolated columns continued to fall back. Beyond Ermelo the rolling veldt gave way to rough hilly country where the valleys and rivers were

flooded. Some commandos turned back through the British lines to the west, others dispersed into the pathless mountains in the south-east, to become relatively safe.

At the beginning of March General De la Rey decided that Lichtenburg, a small town built around a market square in the western Transvaal, seemed particularly vulnerable. Lichtenburg had been held by the British since November 1900. Furthermore, it was De la Rey's home town. The garrison at the time of the attack consisted mainly of officers and men of the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers, 100 Yeomen, and a detachment of New Zealanders manning two guns—in all, 620 men under Lieut-Colonel C. G. C. Money in a hostile countryside, with the nearest British column no less than 70 miles away.

At 3.15 a.m. on 3 March 1901 De la Rey and Commandant Smuts began the assault with 1,200 men supported by one gun. The soldiers defended outlying trenches and sangars and fought from buildings in the town against the attacks lasting all day. The picket lines put up such a stout resistance that, even though the Boers reached the tree-lined streets at some points, they only succeeded in overrunning one post. A ceasefire at 5.30 in the afternoon allowed both sides to remove the dead and wounded. After that shooting continued until about midnight.

On 18 March De la Rey reported to Botha: 'I made an attack on Lichtenburg, and for a whole day stopped in the dorp, where the enemy has occupied churches and offices and has schanzes all around them. It was impossible to go further. I therefore retired the following day, taking with me all the cattle belonging to them. My casualties were heavy, 14 dead and 38 wounded, but those of the enemy were heavier.' The Boer General, J. G. Celliers, was among those wounded and seven prisoners were taken. The British losses were 18 killed and 24 wounded.

In his despatches on 8 May 1901 Kitchener mentioned two civilian women, Miss Edith Matthews and Miss Gertrude Hammam, who tended the wounded all day, 'though the hospital was under fire during the attack on Lichtenburg 3-3-1901'.

Edith Matthews was a young Boer woman who with much tenderness had nursed the wounded of both armies in the small hospital at Lichtenburg since the commencement of hostilities in the region in June 1900. For several months before the British securely held Lichtenburg, both the troops and the commandos entered and re-entered the small town. It was in this period that Edith Matthews nursed a number of severely wounded Bushmen.

In a letter received in Australia by the mother of a mortally wounded Bushman, the young Boer nurse wrote:

After waiting for more than a month, at last I have obtained your address. I thought you might be glad to hear from one who, though an utter stranger to

you, yet God granted to be at the bedside of your dying son, and before I tell you of him I want to tender my sympathy to you and the family. I know such a loss must be very great. I might mention that I am not a professional nurse, only an amateur trying [to do] my little for my country and my people. The hospital belongs to the so called Boers. Your son with four of his companions was brought here by some of his own people because they were mortally wounded and could not be taken on to the field hospital. They were all in very great pain, poor lads. Your son was a general favourite in the wards. I always used to call him 'My Laddie,' which he seemed to like very much.

One day after dressing wounds and giving the young man something to drink, your son asked me to hand him a photo which he had in a case in his pocket. After taking it out of the case and gazing at the portrait he closed his eyes and pressed the photo against his breast; he always kept that photo next to his bed. One afternoon when one of his wounded companions had died, he called me to his bedside and said: 'Poor Mother. How I wish I could be back with you in Australia.' So I told him we were going to make him quite well and send him back to Mother.

We all expected him to pull through, but God willed it otherwise. I tried everything to make his last hours pleasant and everything I thought you would have done had you been with him. I sat on his bed fanning him and gave him everything he asked for. Once he looked sad and despondent, so I said, 'Poor Laddie, you will be better tomorrow.' Fixing those large blue eyes on me he said, 'I'll be on the way to the happy land.' I said, 'You are looking forward to it?' He replied, 'Yes.' He did not want me to leave his bed. If I knelt before his bed fanning him he would say, 'You are too good spoiling me in that way.'

I thought I would spoil him for your sake. I remained at his bed holding his hand until he died. He fixed those large blue eyes on me until I closed them. There I remained. I could not leave my Laddie. I thought my heart would break and those tears that fall for your people as well as my own dropped on the face of that Laddie whose Mother and sisters were so far away. I kissed him for all your sakes. Tell his sisters that I tried to be a sister to him. I am only nineteen and he twenty, so he must have adopted me for one, and we try to be even kinder to patients coming from the other side, because their loved ones are so far.

We had him buried in the graveyard, his name marked with a cross on which is written his name and regiment. His coffin was covered with beautiful wreaths. I attended to his grave as if it were one of my own people, so don't trouble about that. I pray God that He will comfort you all, as He alone can comfort.

This letter was published in the *Melbourne Age* on 25 June 1901, the newspaper adding that it had been read to the congregation of the Baptist church in Fitzroy, having been handed to the Reverend Edward Isaac by one of the trooper's sisters, who regularly attended the church.

In 1972 the author visited Lichtenburg and narrowed down the search for the trooper Edith Matthews had nursed to three New South Wales soldiers whose graves were found in the well-tended military cemetery. It was found that some of the Matthews family still lived in the district and one of them

was approached in Johannesburg. The late Mr Mannie Matthews, a cousin of Edith, said after a lot of thought about the long ago that Edith had often spoken of a young soldier with a name something like Abelman. There now seemed little doubt that 'Laddie' was no other than Trooper Alexander McFarlane Aberline, New South Wales Imperial Bushmen, who died of wounds at Lichtenburg on 4 October 1900. Through Mr and Mrs Bester of Johannesburg further members of the Matthews family were located: Mr and Mrs C. W. Matthews on their farm at Warm Bad and Mrs C. Reynolds on a farm at Potchefstroom. At the latter place Mr Harry Matthews, a younger brother of Edith, recalled her short life. After the war she had married Fred Gardiner, formerly a British soldier, and she died in 1910 before she reached the age of 30. Her memory was still fresh in the minds of her family.

In 1973 the author contacted members of Trooper Aberline's family in Australia. Mr A. M. Aberline, of Manly, New South Wales, said that his uncle, Trooper Aberline, had come from Hay and that two of his sisters had been living at Fitzroy early in the century but nothing was known of Nurse Edith or her letter. Mr Aberline said that as he was the first boy to be born in his family after the death of his uncle in South Africa, he had been christened Alexander Matthew Aberline, thus bearing his uncle's Christian names. Mr Aberline was amazed when he was told that Defence Department records revealed that his uncle's two Christian names had been Alexander McFarlane. His parents had joined the name of his uncle Trooper Aberline and that of Edith Matthews but the reason had long been forgotten.

The story was rounded off in January 1973 when Mrs A. Moorecroft of Queenstown, Cape Province, wrote saying that she was Edith's younger sister. 'I cannot remember the lad's name, it has slipped my memory,' she wrote. 'I am nearing 82 but I remember the occasion as if it were yesterday. I have never seen Edith so upset. She truly mourned his loss. For many years we put flowers on the three graves of the Australians.'

Trooper Aberline had been mortally wounded in an action fought on 9 September when the New South Wales Bushmen, attached to a column led by Major-General C. W. H. Douglas, marched from Ottoshoop along the road to Lichtenburg. Over the next few days the column clashed with the enemy on five occasions, taking 50 prisoners, wagons, flocks and equipment. Lichtenburg was reoccupied on 13 September and after leaving a garrison in occupation the column rode on to Leeupan, 35 miles to the south-west, where it clashed with General Lemmer's commando, capturing a field gun and a pom-pom and taking some prisoners. On 25 September the column set off for Rustenburg, camping at noon at Rietkuil, about 10 miles south of Lichtenburg. Late that afternoon the outposts came under fire and on 28 September Bushmen patrols suffered 11 casualties. Three of the wounded

men, Troopers J. J. Fahey, A. R. Mackellar and Aberline, all from 'F' Squadron, died later from their wounds in the hospital at Lichtenburg.

In the same action Trooper Albert Ezzy, with bullet holes in his clothing, saddle and rifle butt, escaped with a slight wound in his side. Trooper James Collins wrote to his mother in Hay, New South Wales, from Waterkloof, near Rustenburg, on 7 October 1900 and the letter appeared in the *Hay Standard* on 21 November:

'On 28 September 11 of our men were out scouting near Lichtenburg when they saw 200 Boers at a farmhouse. When they got within 200 yards of it the Boer leader, Lemmer, came out with a white flag behind his back, being under the impression that he and his commando were about to be captured by our men whose numbers he over-estimated. On finding that our men were so few he changed his mind and ordered his men to fire. Instead of our men surrendering, they galloped away and 9 of them were shot. I think 5 will die. They were not expected to live when we left them at Lichtenburg hospital. Alick Aberline was one of them. The doctor told us he is sure to die. He was shot through the stomach with an explosive bullet. All were shot with either soft-nosed or explosive bullets. If they hit you, then you are not much good supposing you do live.

'We also had a fight with some of Lemmer's men the same day, our losses being one man killed and 10 wounded — 7 Yeomen, 2 artillerymen and some of us. The enemy fired three 15-pounder shells at us, doing no damage. Before we could get close enough they had taken their guns away. They are very quick at getting their fallen men away as they don't want us to know their losses. . . P.S. I have got Alick Aberline's dog and will try and get him back with me if I can. I am the only one left out of the 4 now.'

When Kitchener heard of the attack on Lichtenburg he sent Major-General J. M. Babington from the north-west of Krugersdorp with 2,000 men to go after De la Rey. Although at first held up by heavy rain which also delayed his supplies, General Babington followed De la Rey southwards towards Klerksdorp. On the 23rd he came into contact with the Boer rear-guard north-west of Klerksdorp, shelling them and compelling them to retire in haste. Early on the following morning as the pursuit continued, scouts scattered enemy pickets on a ridge. Other Boers seen ahead saddling up on a farm were shelled. A mile further on the Boer convoy came unexpectedly in sight.

At the end of a long chase, 400 New Zealanders and Bushmen riding hard for 12 miles on both flanks overtook the Boer wagon train where it lay spread along the veldt at Wildfontein. The colonials captured 140 prisoners, 77 wagons and carts, a pom-pom and six Maxims, two of the 15-pounder guns lost to the Boers at Colenso, rifles and tens of thousands of rounds of

ammunition. Lieutenant J. McDonald, Fourth New Zealand Contingent, reported in the *Otago Witness*:

'Sunday, 24 March 1901, near Ventersdorp. We reached the top of the rise to find the advance guard dismounting and firing at the enemy, who are now dotted all along the next slope over two or three miles of front. There is the Boer gun about two miles off, getting away as fast as its mules can gallop. We are cantering over the wide top of the rise. Then Colonel Grey gives his order. "Go on and take that gun. New Zealanders to the left, Bushmen to the right. Increase your front to two squadrons each."

'Our chance had come at last. Down the slope we gallop, racing for the spruit, when suddenly from behind us comes the welcome sound, pom-pom-pom-pom from a gun which protected us as we advanced. We staggered a bit as we cantered up the slope, our formation being broken in crossing the spruit, but the Otago and Southland boys still covered a mile of front, being about 100 strong, extended at 20 yards intervals. Groups of Boers, here a dozen, and there a dozen, made off as we galloped on. Six miles we had come without drawing rein. We breasted another swell, and saw — oh, glorious sight — not only the Boer gun, but the Boer convoy making its way to our right front. "Change direction to the right," we yelled. "There's our convoy," and round the boys swung. It was pretty to see them work. No bunching or grouping. The interval between the files was still there.

'The long line of wagons was strung out in twos and threes on the veldt, travelling as fast as their teams would take them. The hindmost wagons were still two miles from us. Eight miles over hill and hollow, we urge the horses on. It is the survival of the fittest. Another spruit runs across our path. At it we race. Tired horses are falling back in the running. There are not more than 60 men in the front rank now. Ten miles and the leading men are now almost abreast of the wagons. Then the fun really begins.

'Rumble gets a bullet through his sleeve. Drininan gets one through the helmet. But who's going to stop now? Trooper Wylie attacks four Boers himself. They fire at him from their horses and miss. He drops two of them and the others gallop off. "Hands up Johnny. Throw down that gun." On they go from wagon to wagon. "Put up your hands," and mule teams are turned round. "Hands up. Put down that Mauser," and the 15-pounder gun is captured.

'So it went on for three or four miles along that straggling line of wagons, guns and carts, the Australians coming in at a gallop from the right shortly after we swooped down on the left. As we rode back with our capture, Colonel Shekleton himself and his officers were most enthusiastic in their congratulations. The Imperial Light Horse and the composite regiment were coming along in support somewhere behind us, but we left them and our guns out of sight and out of mind.

'The whole affair seemed to resolve itself into this, that 200 New Zealanders and 200 Australians got the word to go, and they went. Four hundred colonials turned loose on 600 or 700 Boers in open country, and rode straight at them, and even as we galloped at them the Boers scattered and fell back. They told us afterwards: "When we saw you galloping at us like that, we knew then that you were colonials." The afternoon was spent in reckoning up the extent of our catch.'

In a report to Botha on 29 March, De la Rey said: 'As far as we could see there were nothing but mounted men in full gallop. The enemy charged us so actively, and in such a wide formation, that we all ran the danger of being surrounded and captured. We were thus compelled to retire again with the loss of the whole of our laager, as there was no obedience to my order to retire when the fight began early in the morning; and heavy rain having fallen the previous evening, the draught animals were soon exhausted and were not able to draw the carts and wagons. To my great grief, I have to state that two Armstrong guns and one Vickers Maxim fell into the hands of the enemy. However, two of them were defective. About 100 burghers were captured by the enemy, three killed and seven wounded. In this fight I had 300 men with me.'³

The British claimed 22 Boers dead and 32 wounded. Their own losses were two killed and seven wounded.

In his despatches to the War Office, dated 8 July, General Kitchener mentioned a number of Bushmen for their part in the action. He wrote: 'Sergeant Albert Thompson, promoted to Second Lieutenant, seeing eight of the enemy about to occupy a wood, took 15 men and galloped to anticipate them, which he did. Had this wood been occupied, the advance guard would have been impeded and checked for a time. Lance-Corporal George McClymont, noticing a Boer shooting at Lieutenant Thomas Hungerford from a pass at short range, charged and shot him. Trooper Robert Newlands, seeing some Boers trying to get a limber away, charged them by himself, and engaged them till supported by more men, when the limber was taken. Trooper Henry Rhodenback was a scout on the extreme right of the advance, and found 50 Boers in a gully; he opened fire and kept on firing until the Boers retired. Trooper William Fewkes charged a kopje under heavy fire, firing himself from his horse. The rest of the troops followed and the enemy fled.' Trooper Wylie, a New Zealander, unsupported 'charged a gun defended by four of the enemy, two of whom he killed, and then captured the gun'. Trooper Langham of the 4th New Zealand Regiment and Trooper P. J. Moy, 'C' Squadron, New South Wales Imperial Bushmen, were each awarded the DCM for their gallant conduct in this action. Moy was promoted to corporal.

³ From a report by the Director of Military Intelligence to the War Office, based on documents captured in Boer laagers or taken from Boer despatch riders.

About this time Lieutenant W. S. Rich, originally a New South Wales Rifleman, now serving in the 2nd Cheshire Regiment, wrote an interesting account from Ventersdorp: 'That same evening we went into Klerksdorp with an escort of Mounted Infantry, and next day we simply kept quiet in camp, rain falling once or twice. While we were sitting smoking we heard heavy and continuous firing on our front right flank, and presently a patrol came galloping in, having been chased by about three times their number of Boers. Then we all cleared up on to the ridge and saw a whole crowd of the enemy on the opposite rise about 2,000 yards away. One Boer on a grey horse galloped right across our front at a distance of about 2,200 yards, and we all blazed at him, but we did not hit him apparently, as he kept on making off. The man on the grey horse I found out later was General Smuts. Had we only known at the time, we might have taken some risks to try and capture him.'

The line terminating at Pietersburg, 180 miles north of Pretoria, was the only section of the railway system not under British control. The Boers had collected some stores in this isolated town and established a small centre of supply for the country to the east, towards Lydenburg. It was the only remaining town of any size that had not been occupied by the army. Kitchener turned his attention to securing this railway, at the same time eliminating a number of flour mills, stores and a printing press at Pietersburg. For the purpose he appointed General Plumer to command a mixed force.

Plumer left Pretoria for Pienaar's River on 26 March 1901. He had with him 1,300 mounted riflemen, an engineering detachment, eight field guns, and a pom-pom. His mounted column, consisting entirely of Bushmen and New Zealanders, had recently returned from chasing de Wet. Advancing from Pienaar's River, the column entered Warm Bad after a couple of hours firing. The Boers left tents standing and abandoned empty wagons. The Australians, under Major Vialls, took Buis Kop, held by sniping Boers just beyond the town. The next day, 1 April, Plumer arrived at Nylstroom, the most advanced point along the railway reached by the army a year earlier. From a kopje near the town a single sniper became a nuisance until he was located. Some of the troops dropped bullets all around his operating spot until an old burgher came out with his hands up, content to live after having made a lone protest.

Construction trains followed up as the troops moved on repairing the track, which along some stretches was covered with grass. Detachments of the Telegraph Division repaired the wires. They were accompanied by an armoured train garrisoned with Gordon Highlanders. Infantry detachments were dropped off along the way and formed small garrisons to guard the line in the rear.

For some days rain fell in inches, hampering progress. The column reached

Potgietersrust on Good Friday. Some prisoners were taken and a wagon load of ammunition was found at the station. Surprisingly, the line turned out to be mainly intact. In the district orange orchards flourished. Although the fruit was not quite ripe, it was near enough for the Australians.

A few miles forward from Potgietersrust several Australians and New Zealanders were hit when an advanced patrol of eight scouts ran into an ambush at a spot called De Berg Pass. The scouts held their own on most difficult ground against a party of 40 Boers. Trooper T. H. Angel of the Third West Australian Bushmen was severely wounded on 7 April 1901 when going to assist a wounded man, and died from his wounds on 23 April, the day his award of the DCM was announced. Another West Australian Bushman, Sergeant W. A. George, was mentioned by Plumer in his report 'for conspicuous bravery'. He was awarded the DCM.

The Bushveldt Carbineers, a small body of horsemen specially raised for patrolling in the northern operations, joined Plumer at Warm Bad. Beyond Potgietersrust, after the armoured train had twice been slightly damaged in explosions caused by the line being mined, the Carbineers found some Boers near the railway. Later they located the laager, taking wagons and prisoners. The men were suspected of taking part in the train wrecking but, on being questioned, denied all knowledge of these events or whether the line ahead was also dynamited. The Carbineers got the information needed by placing the Boers in a number of trucks attached in front of the engine especially to take any blast from the track. Several empty pilot trucks went ahead of the prisoners. A few miles further on a terrific blast blew the leading trucks off the line. The trucks carrying the 12 prisoners were damaged, the prisoners being shaken and left covered with dust and debris. From that time on the progress of the engine went smoothly as the Boers co-operated by quickly pointing out further charges laid along the track.

Apart from slight opposition by a few snipers, Plumer's force continued unopposed in pouring rain to Marabastad, 10 miles from Pietersburg. At about 2 a.m. on 8 April the column marched out of the camp, and a few hours later entered Pietersburg. In the Market Square that morning opposite the office of the Landdrost the Republican flag was pulled down and replaced by the Union Jack. A sniper, barricading himself in a house, fired on the troops from a window until he was shot down.

Captain A. A. Sale, First Tasmanian Imperial Bushmen, with a small party of Tasmanians galloped through the town to the eastern side, taking a road up a smooth grassy slope used by late-leaving burghers. A single sniper concealed in the long grass bordering the road shot and mortally wounded Sale; he died next day. The sniper then shot Lieutenant C. H. Walter through the heart when he went to Sale's assistance. Lance-Corporal William Fraser, of the Western Australian Imperial Bushmen was also killed. Captain Walter

Gibson, of the Western Australian Medical Service, galloping in to assist Sale, survived several shots.

Because of other firing in the vicinity the men had difficulty in locating the sniper as they rode quickly in circular fashion through the grass, four feet deep. Trooper S. R. O'May had his horse shot from under him, the fifth horse shot by the sniper's rifle. Finally six Tasmanians, waiting behind when the troops had gone, poured a volley into the sniper, who disclosed his position by a movement in the grass as he began to crawl away. Mad-dened by the loss of their mates, the men rushed in and finished him off with the bayonet. The Boer turned out to be a local schoolmaster, acting in unsupported defiance.

Captain Sale and the other two men killed were buried close to the town in a small cemetery surrounded by eucalyptus trees. General Plumer and his staff attended on both occasions. As the coffins were lowered to their resting places they were covered with gum leaves thrown into the open graves.

General Beyers with 500 burghers retired from Pietersburg the night before the entry of the troops, leaving behind rolling stock, quantities of shells, ammunition and dynamite. Stocks of rifles were found and a Krupp gun taken. For three successive days the Boer munitions were carted to the open space outside the town. At dusk each evening the shells and cartridges were exploded in a fire, the lively display lighting up the veldt. Four flour mills and a printing press were destroyed. After placing the area from Pienaars River to Pietersburg under the command of Lieut-Colonel F. H. Hall, Royal Artillery, the British used Pietersburg as a base for further operations.

On 14 April Plumer marched with his mounted column south-east from Pietersburg to secure the drifts along the Olifants River, with the objective of preventing the escape to the north of Boers affected by a drive beginning at Middelburg. At the end of three days Plumer's force was in position at the drifts. Over 10 days more than 100 prisoners were taken, together with wagons and teams and thousands of rounds of ammunition.

At dawn on 25 April a patrol led by Lieutenant H. A. Reid from South Australia rushed a laager in a daring and successful raid, capturing 41 prisoners and a Maxim gun. Quick firing at short range made the Boers believe that they were being attacked by a large party. In his despatches General Kitchener reported: 'On the night of 24 April a very gallant act was performed by Lieutenant Reid, Imperial Bushmen Corps, who had been detached from General Plumer's post near Commissie Drift. This officer when in charge of a patrol of 20 Australians located a Boer laager some 15 miles south-east of the drift, which he surrounded and boldly attacked at dawn. The enemy at once surrendered, Commandant Schroeder and 41 other prisoners, with a Maxim being taken.'

Lieutenant Reid was awarded the DSO and Sergeant Archie Stocker, a Tasmanian Bushman, received the DCM and was promoted to Lieutenant.

Corporal H. F. Davis, a Tasmanian, sent to obtain information about a drift some miles distant, was in thick bush when he saw a number of burghers with women and children and five wagons. Davis crawled through the scrub undetected until he got close enough to call on the Boers to surrender. Thinking they were caught by a strong force, the burghers laid down their arms. Davis returned to camp with the small convoy and his prisoners. He was later promoted to sergeant.

Altogether Plumer's watch on the Olifants River proved rather uneventful. He returned to Pretoria with his column on 6 May 1901.

CHAPTER 19

The second winter of the war

The resilience of the commando leaders and their tactics of dispersing into small parties under pressure, only to form up again once the British column had passed by, ensured the survival of the fighting burghers who could not be forced into a battle. By the end of the summer of 1900-1901 none of the great drives had resulted in the elimination of any of the leaders under whose inspiration much of the Boer resistance depended.

In the eastern Transvaal both Botha and Ben Viljoen remained at large and in the Free State the elusive de Wet. In the western Transvaal De la Rey and Smuts operated. In the Cape Midlands small commandos led by Kritzinger and others carried on in mountainous country, making their contribution by holding down British columns. Everywhere the commandos raided towns, wrecked trains and mauled weak detachments of troops whenever they could do so.

Over a theatre of war greater in extent than France and Germany put together, Kitchener had difficulty in fully protecting the single-track railways over which his food supplies, guns, ammunition and horses, together with every other kind of supply, must come. Kitchener was compelled to keep large numbers of troops along the railways to counter the

constant attempts at train wrecking. In May 1901 no fewer than 15,000 troops were engaged in protecting the railway between Komati Poort and Pretoria.

Towards the end of 1900 the Second Victorians, on their way home through the Orange Free State, were on the train between Edenburg and Norval's Pont when the line was blown up. The Victorians drove the enemy from a nearby kopje and burned a farmhouse from which the train wreckers operated. Then they helped to repair the line. At the end of February 1901 daring raiders operated almost to the environs of Johannesburg by destroying a culvert on the railway between Natal Spruit and Klip River stations, only 18 miles outside the town, and seizing a train loaded with food, all of which they removed in carts held waiting in readiness in a donga.

In an informative letter written from Middelburg early in 1900 A. W. Coughlan—then a trooper in the Second Victorian Mounted Rifles—described some of the difficulties in defending the railways: 'The general impression among all the ranks is that the Boers have no organisation whatever, and are literally bushrangers in a wholesale way, living by and for plunder and the excitement of a lawless life. Their principal depredations are on the railways. From the fastnesses of the hills they steal down, place a charge of dynamite on the rails, and wait. After the explosion they fire on the train, till the white flag is hoisted, then collar the movable loot, set fire to the wreck and make off. There are, with all precautions, trains derailed on every line almost every week. The British allow no night travelling now. When the troops are to travel a pilot engine goes ahead at dawn, and if the line is free, three or four trains, one armoured, follow close together. If the line is not clear, it is rough on the devoted drivers of the pilot. Behind each engine and each van of every train there is an armoured truck, and the men travel in open trucks fully armed, ready at any moment for defence or attack.'

The first so-called flying columns introduced by Lord Roberts to deal with the guerillas were made up of infantry, guns, field hospitals, and wagons drawn by oxen operating from garrison towns. The advance, accompanied by a screen of mounted scouts, averaged something like 10 to 15 miles a day. When Kitchener called for more mounted infantry things began to alter, although at first the half-trained Yeomanry, acting as escorts to supply columns, were too often easy marks for the burghers, especially when they were usually expected to operate with full regulation impedimenta that slowed down and sapped the strength of their mounts, operating under a full weight averaging 20 stone. 'There are a lot of Yeomen here waiting to go to the front,' wrote Trooper A. H. C. Waine, Third New South Wales Mounted Rifles. 'They are called de Wet's Own.'

With the passing of the months the army built up columns of mounted infantry. Few infantry were used for duties other than on fixed posts on the lines of communication or to form permanent garrisons for the towns. The changing situation is explained by Lance-Corporal Jonathan Williams, New South Wales Imperial Bushmen: 'The gallant infantry regiment, the 5th Northumberland Fusiliers, are with us. We are the only boys they pal in with. They swear by the Bushies and we always have some at our camp. They are good soldiers and have been all through Modder River and Orange Free State battles but are not much good to us here, as they never get near the Boers. The enemy clear out when they see us coming. Tommy has no hope of catching them. He guards our convoys and does outpost work.'

Lieut-Colonel N. W. Kelly, a Victorian Bushman, set out the position in the western Transvaal: 'The present situation is roughly this. The towns are mostly garrisoned by infantry with a small proportion of Paget's Horse or Imperial Yeomanry to each. Then there is a flying column, under the direct command of General Methuen, to which we are attached, which moves all over the country to wherever the Boers assemble in any number.'

Kitchener always had to contend with the constant problem of remounts, some imported from Australia and others from anywhere they could be obtained. The padre, the Reverend James Green who saw a lot of service with the Bushmen, had this to say: 'Speaking of horses all critics in South Africa admit that the colonial horse or a Basuto pony is by far the safest mount. The Australian horses are perhaps the slowest in the process of acclimatisation. The Hungarian and Argentine horses were badly selected, and are for the most part hard-mouthed weeds. There is not the slightest doubt that from the first the Boers had the advantage over us, in that they rode the hardened native animal, which itself was the result of the peculiar necessities of South African use, while we had to ride imported horses of all sorts, that had not been allowed to rest after the voyage. Had the British army authorities bought up all the colonial horses at the beginning of the war, as they were repeatedly urged to do, the end might now have been in sight.'

The number of fighting burghers continued to fluctuate. British Intelligence could never be quite certain of the strength of the highly irregular Boer forces that were constantly affected by the circulating movements of those burghers less willing to fight. It was estimated in May 1901 that the hard core of the Boer fighting force permanently in the field contained about 13,000 burghers, a number irregularly swollen by thousands of intermittent fighters.

On 10 May 1901 the Boer leaders met near Ermelo where they arrived at a decision to contact Kitchener, seeking his agreement to allowing a

delegate to leave for Europe to acquaint President Kruger of the condition of the country and the prospects of the Republics. They sought Kruger's opinion on what was now in the best interests of their countries. Kitchener refused to grant any direct communication with the President by the means desired, but offered to allow a cable to be sent, with facilities for a reply from Kruger. The cable went by the medium of the representative of the Dutch Government in Pretoria. Kruger's reply had the effect of dismissing any latent thoughts of surrender.

The Australians continued to be broken up in units all over the country. Once a man left his column for some reason, instead of returning to it he was very often drafted to the nearest force. The fact that the Australians were represented in nearly every mounted column was proof of their value. They readily adapted themselves to the type of service required and to the environment of veldt and kopje.

Captain Ham wrote from Rustenburg on 31 October describing some of the trying conditions associated with patrolling in the wet season: 'I cannot give you a long description of our trek. Just let me say that we are having part of the African wet season which everybody dreads here. During the time we have been out on this trek it has poured in torrents for five nights. We have no tents and get into camp at all hours wet through and through. We cannot light a fire but make a meal from a dry biscuit and squat about in the mud anywhere shelter can be gained, waiting for the order to start next morning, which generally comes about three o'clock. We ride in our wet clothes next day until the sun dries the saddle and our garments. This has occurred on five successive nights, so you can imagine the time we are having. Last night it rained heavily but as we got into camp beforehand, we had shelter.

'At Jericho a party of Boers rode up to a Queensland outpost, shot one fellow and took the horses and arms from the others. They had feathers in their hats and were dressed just as Queenslanders. The outpost thought it was a party of our own men.'

On 13 May 1901 the Fifth and Sixth Western Australian Mounted Infantry Contingents, under Lieut-General Sir Bindon Blood, took part in a drive in the eastern Transvaal. In severe fighting on 15 May at Grobbelaar Recht near Carolina, the West Australians lost seven killed and eight wounded. One of the wounded later died. The next day the running fight continued at Brakpan. In a retirement from the right flank, Lieutenant F. W. Bell returned to help a wounded and dismounted man by taking him up behind him. Under the combined weight of the two men the horse fell almost immediately. After sending the wounded man back on the horse, Bell remained behind to cover him by rifle fire until the danger had passed. For his valour that day Bell was awarded the Victoria Cross.

Lieutenant Bell had been seriously wounded when serving as a trooper with the First West Australians at Palmietfontein, when Major Moor was killed in July 1900. After being invalided to England he returned to Western Australia. He had enlisted again early in 1901.

When the First Victorian Contingent returned home in December 1900, Trooper James Rogers stayed in South Africa to serve as a scout with a locally raised force known as the South African Constabulary. He was later promoted to sergeant. In June 1901 a column of 500 Royal Irish Rifles were active in the south-east of the Free State, repelling small parties of the enemy who had returned to the area where they had suffered defeat a year earlier. After some skirmishing on the morning of 15 June the column returned in the afternoon to near Thaba 'Nchu, where a rearguard detachment of two Imperial officers and six men of the South African Constabulary found themselves being attacked by about 60 Boers. When his horse was shot, one of the Imperial officers, Lieutenant Dickinson, tried to continue on foot. Noticing his predicament Sergeant Rogers turned back, took Dickinson up with him, and rode to where the column was stopped at a high fence behind a mealie field fully half a mile back. Rogers returned twice more, riding up to within 400 yards of the Boers and on each occasion picking up a man whose horse had been shot. After that he managed to ride down and recover the horses of two other dismounted riders, enabling them to mount and ride to safety. All this activity took place under rifle fire, with the enemy often close enough to be heard calling loudly for his surrender. In his trips into the firing line, Rogers got a bullet through his hat, searing his head, and another through the sole of his boot. He was awarded the Victoria Cross.

In the western Transvaal on a march from Wolmaransstad with General Methuen's column, a brave act was performed by Lance-Corporal A. N. Gregg, Victorian Imperial Bushmen. Gregg was mentioned by Kitchener in despatches on 7 March 1901 and promoted to sergeant. On 12 March Lieutenant Ewen Wanliss gave the following account: 'It turned out that the enemy was in force on the hills, and included Potgieter's, De Beer's and Du Toit's commandos. Well, then started a battle, fast and furious it waged across the valley. At about a mile range we were shooting. We peppered for all we could, the pom-poms turned up, and the 15-pounders went at it hammer and tongs. Things were very warm and bullets were landing all round, and going phthat, phthat, as they kicked up the dust alongside. Right on till dark through a shower of rain we fought, finally driving them off the hills with our heavy shell fire.

'On this day one of "A" Squadron named Gregg, a quiet and decent fellow, was recommended for the Victoria Cross. A Yeomanry officer had a man, one of the advanced guard, left over on the Boer side of the valley, and was in a great state about it, as we were all leaving the ridge. This fellow

said he would go and get him. A Yeoman trooper went with him, to show him where the man to be rescued was. When he got there through a very heavy fire, Gregg said to him: "Get hold of my stirrup and run alongside." The poor beggar, only a youngster, had collapsed, and Gregg couldn't put him on his horse because it was too weak. So Gregg then rode back, and the former got under cover. Gregg then took the Yeoman's horse, and leading him galloped back by himself to the prostrate youth, under the fire of some hundreds of Mausers, at close range of 900 yards and upwards, and safely brought him back.

'The deed was witnessed by only about four men, among them the Yeoman officer, who was most enthusiastic about the whole thing, saying it was the pluckiest and coolest thing he ever saw. It was wonderfully plucky on the part of Gregg, and he thought it all out himself, and so quickly too. He may get the VC and he may not, as it is a hard thing to get; but I think that if Lord Methuen had seen it he certainly would.'

At Ganna Hoek in the Cape Colony in May 1901 the Tasmanian Imperial Bushmen, under Colonel Wallack, took part in a drive against Scheepers' commando in the Cradock district. A four-man patrol led by Trooper Eric Brownell, scouting wide on the right flank from the main body, was suddenly intercepted and cut off by a party of 22 Boers. The Tasmanians scattered. One pair managed to get back safely, although both men received slight wounds.

Troopers Brownell and John Warburton were not so successful. Forced to defend themselves against the encircling Boers from cover no better than short tree stumps about nine inches in diameter, they survived the first attack by shooting 10 of the Boer horses and forcing the burghers to take cover in a dry spruit. Because the Boers wanted the troopers' horses they did not attempt to shoot them. The two men, however, shot the horses to give themselves better cover. They also shot three Boers who, slumping forward, lay exposed until dragged back by their boots into the spruit.

When Warburton was shot through the head Brownell exposed himself to a score of rifles while bandaging him up. A bullet creased his shoulder, cutting his jacket and shirt. When he ran out of ammunition Brownell surrendered. Then stripped of his clothing and released by the burghers, he walked back to camp. He returned that night to the scene of the fight with the ambulance, guiding it to where the wounded Warburton lay. Warburton later died of his wounds. Brownell who had previously been invalided home as a result of his service with the first Tasmanian contingent, later transferred to the Imperial Army. On 8 July his name appeared in Kitchener's despatches: 'Trooper E. Brownell, Tasmanian Imperial Bushmen, on the 9 May at Ganna Hoek, Cape Colony, showed distinguished bravery in fighting (with only one other man, No. 252, Trooper J. E. Warburton,

Tasmanian Imperial Bushmen) 22 Boers, killing two men and horses. Finding he could not escape, and his comrade being mortally wounded, shot both horses to prevent them falling into enemy hands. Taken prisoner and stripped, he was released, then he walked into camp, and at once took out an ambulance, remained out all night, and brought in Trooper Warburton.' (Brownell later received an Imperial commission.)

With the coming of the second winter of the war the men were once again patrolling and sleeping on the veldt, heavy with frost. Corporal H. N. R. Mead serving in the New South Wales Army Medical Corps put it this way: 'We are only allowed two blankets and a waterproof for bed and bedding, and no tent, so I can tell you it is not so warm. The top blanket is generally as stiff as a piece of galvanised iron with frost in the morning, and my feet sometimes stick out at the bottom, and then I think I have no feet at all when I wake up.'

Sister Marion Martin, a New South Wales Army Nursing Sister, wrote to friends in Sydney, in acknowledging the receipt of comforts for the troops: 'For those going again to the front we give the warmest clothing. The cold weather will be passing away, but our men will have suffered much from pneumonia and rheumatism from the exposure. Let the socks be warm, the feet full size, no harsh worsted, for his feet are so tender. If peace were declared tomorrow, there would be quite three months sickness to contend with in South Africa, and Tommy would be still waiting for his comforts.'

On the evening of 5 June Colonel De Lisle sent Major J. R. F. Sladen, of the East Yorkshire Regiment, with 100 Mounted Infantry and 100 South Australian Imperial Bushmen ahead of the main column to intercept a Boer convoy in the vicinity of Reitz, well east of Kroonstad in the Free State. Following a night march, the convoy was captured on the morning of the 6th. Forty prisoners were taken after only a slight resistance. Sladen then sent a party of 40 of his men back to De Lisle. Until the arrival of the main column he took up a position with the captured wagons close to a kraal on Graspan Farm. Five miles away Generals de Wet and De la Rey on the way to the Transvaal were interrupted at breakfast by a galloper bearing the news of the capture of the convoy by a small detachment. The Boer leaders decided to attempt to recapture the convoy. As they neared Graspan they were met by Lieutenant Samuel White. It was an instance of mistaken identity. White was sent forward because in the distance the approaching riders were thought to be Bethune's Mounted Infantry. The unfortunate lieutenant soon found himself stripped of his uniform. Clad only in a shirt, he got away and ran six miles to warn De Lisle of Sladen's impending danger.

Directed by de Wet and De la Rey, between 300 and 400 burghers

attacked the 160 soldiers, who fought from the kraal with the wagons parked around. The Boers crept up to and fought from under the wagons, firing between the wheel spokes. In four hours close fighting they made little impression on the defence. With the approach of De Lisle with the main column, the Boers swiftly went away, taking some of the wagons with them. De Lisle dashed off in fast pursuit, recapturing all but two of the vehicles.

Both sides lost heavily that morning. The British had 20 killed and 25 wounded, including eight South Australians killed and six wounded. The Boers left 14 dead and six wounded on the field. The others they took away in Cape carts. Many women were trekking with the captured convoy, which yielded 114 wagons and carts, 10,000 rounds of ammunition, 4,000 head of cattle and large stocks of food.

Among those killed was Lieutenant John Mair, a former New South Wales artilleryman, who had arrived in South Africa before the war broke out. After serving with the Cape Mounted Police in Kimberley for the duration of the siege, he joined the New South Wales Mounted Rifles and became galloper to Colonel De Lisle.

In despatches dated 28 June 1901 Kitchener named two South Australians—Captain E. J. F. Langley for his prominent part in the defence at Graspan, and Sergeant L. D. Grewar, 'who by his courage and example greatly contributed to the defeat of the desperate attack made by the enemy'. Grewar was promoted Squadron Sergeant-Major. Captain Langley was awarded the DSO; he had originally left Adelaide on 26 January 1900 as a sergeant in the Second South Australian Mounted Rifles.

The Fifth Victorian Mounted Rifles landed in South Africa in the early months of 1901. By June they were at Middelburg in the eastern Transvaal attached to the column of Major-General S. B. Beatson, a distinguished Indian Army cavalry officer and a strict disciplinarian. The colonials had already become aware of this during the course of the trek from Pretoria to Middelburg.

On 10 June a flying column of 350 Victorians under Major Morris, an Imperial officer, was detached from Beatson's column at Vandyke's Drift, south of Middelburg. Under orders to make a sweep through the country south of the drift, they took with them two days rations, Cape carts, and two pom-poms. The column did not regain contact with Beatson until the early morning of 12 June when a helio message which had been received restricted any further advance southwards. The movements of the column for the remainder of the day were later given by the senior Victorian officer, Major William McKnight, in a report to the Australian Prime Minister:

'Morris then ordered us not to go any further south, but to take up a position indicated by him two miles to the east. He then gave me orders to

send a company to meet the food and forage wagons, which arrived about 5 p.m. During the whole of the day the Boers were plainly visible in small parties about 2,000 yards distant, and although a lot of sniping was carried on, there were no casualties on our side.'

At about 5 o'clock that afternoon the column camped along the Ermelo road, near the Steenkool Spruit, not far from the house of Mrs Du Toit, 20 miles south of Middelburg, on the farm named Wilmansrust. The position was between 11 and 12 miles from Beatson's main camp.

It was decided that observation posts placed as the camp settled down would be replaced at sundown by the main pickets. However, the arrangement was not adhered to because even though the night pickets were ready early, Major Morris kept them within the camp, dressing rifles and saddles, so that the completion of the change-over did not take place until about 7 o'clock. Major McKnight continued in his report: 'Captain Watson who was adjutant for Major Morris, instructed Lieutenant T. H. Power where the pickets were to be posted. Their positions were as follows: One non-commissioned officer and six men on the right front of the guns, and the same number on the left side about 500 yards from our camp. One non-commissioned officer and 12 men in rear of the camp, one non-commissioned officer and 20 men on a small kopje about 1,000 yards on the right rear.'

The camp rested on a slight rise about 100 yards square, with a deep donga all round, and higher kopjes in the background. Along one edge most of the horses were tethered in lines. In the centre the two pom-pom guns stood side by side, fully loaded under canvas covers with the muzzles protruding. Close by, on the order of Major Morris, the rifles were stacked in piles in a manner complying strictly to drill regulations that by this time were rarely observed on the veldt and was an especially unwise adherence to regulations when the enemy was known to be in the nearby hills. The Cape carts were placed to the rear of the guns, the mule wagons in a nearby kraal.

Meanwhile three miles away Boer scouts lost no time in reporting the presence of the Victorians to a small group of 150 burghers belonging to General Viljoen's commando and plans were made to attack the Victorian camp. Reliably guided by local farmers, who had quietly noted in broad daylight the positions of the posts set by Major Morris on the crests of the bare hills, the burghers led by General Muller set off at dusk. A small valley or depression in the hills brought them to the base of the rise at the foot of the camp without being observed. This they achieved by more or less following the pickets in as the change-over was being effected.

Leaving 30 of their number as horseholders, the burghers advanced, extended at intervals of 10 yards. By 7.30 p.m. the Victorians' camp lay before them, only 120 yards ahead. Some of the soldiers were still moving about,

others were sitting before the low camp fires after the completion of the evening meal. The majority had already made themselves as comfortable as possible for the night. Some slept by their saddles and bridles near the horse lines. At a given signal — the blowing of a whistle — the burghers ran forward, firing from the hip into the front of the camp.

Taken completely by surprise as the rifles flashed in the night, some of the Victorians were killed as they slept. Others, only half awake, scrambled out of the blankets towards the rifle stacks but the enemy, right on top of them, shot many before they could do anything. The few who managed to get a rifle tried to make a fight of it. Several men were shot making an effort to bring one of the guns into action. Some got into the horse lines between the dead horses, emptying their magazines by firing back into the camp, without the certainty of hitting only the enemy. Shouting and shooting, the burghers, many of whom wore British uniforms, ran through the camp, now being rapidly turned into a shambles with the stampeding of wounded horses and the dead and wounded everywhere.

Within ten minutes it was all over. The Boers took away the guns, the carts, wagons and about 300 horses. The latter were later described by General Viljoen as 'the most miserable collection of animals I have ever seen'.¹ Two officers and 50 men escaped, and reached Beatson's camp. The Boers marched about 80 prisoners a mile out on the veldt and let them go. This was the common practice of the Boers at this time, for they lacked the means of keeping prisoners. Before they left the wrecked camp the Boers took lanterns to search for their dead and wounded.

The news of the disaster reached General Beatson at midnight. Eager to march to Wilmansrust immediately the Victorians were critical of Beatson because no start was made until after daylight. The General arrived at Wilmansrust with the column at about 10 a.m. The ambulance came later.

The Victorians felt that the capture of the camp was mainly due to the tactics of Major Morris, who had recently come over from India with General Beatson. They held the view that this officer knew very little of what was required in warfare against the Boers. It was not that they considered that the site of the camp was a bad one, but they were critical of the placing of the pickets and at such wide intervals. When the attack came the majority of the men were unarmed and at some distance from their weapons, due to the stacking of the rifles on the orders of Major Morris. The fact that many of the Boers wore British uniforms added to the confusion of those who were able to make some kind of defence.

From a hospital at Middelburg, Trooper Frank Halsall gave his account: 'On the night of 12 June 1901, at about 8 o'clock, the Boers rushed the camp. The Boers got in through the pickets without being seen, and when within

100 yards of the camp they opened a most terrific fire. We all had our rifles piled up (a most foolish order) and had not time to get at them, so we simply had to lie flat on the ground expecting that the fusillade would stop or slacken for a moment or so. But unfortunately it did not stop for an instant until the Boers went through the camp, shooting men down and yelling like madmen. We had 21 killed and 45 wounded. The Boers took two pom-poms from us, nearly all our rifles and ammunition and such horses that were alive, and then they left us. Our doctor was killed, and it was noon next day before we could get another doctor.

'I have been in hospital since Saturday (four days). It took us three days to come in on bullock wagons. My wound is not too bad. I was hit on the left temple just as I was getting up.'

Major McKnight gave his own account: 'Dr Herbert Palmer and I had lain down in a small tent about half past seven. We had got a mail, mostly papers, that night and I had two candles burning and we were reading. I had taken off my boots, leggings and belt. About a quarter to eight firing opened on us, right in front where the guns were. I blew the candles out, and said to Dr Palmer, "They are on us." I did not hear his answer as I rushed to get my carbine out of the bushes close to the Cape cart and get the bandolier. As I did so a man fell against me and then I heard the voice of the veterinary officer, Captain Sherlock, close to me. He said: "I'm hit." I crossed to lines F and G, telling the men not to fire as they would only hit their comrades. A number of them used their rifles as clubs.

'I went down the lines and went up to several men in khaki and said: "Do not fire lads, you are shooting your comrades." One turned to me and asked me what I said. I repeated the words and then he spoke in Dutch, to which I could not reply. He caught my carbine and said: "You —, would you shoot me?". Two others also came to me and put the muzzles of their rifles to my body and cursed me, but did not fire. They seized me and took me up to the guns where I found several of our fellows prisoners. After firing ceased I asked for leave to assist the wounded and after half an hour they let me go and did not molest me.

'I then helped Sherlock with the wounded. Dr Palmer was shot dead. He was one of the most unselfish men I ever met, and so good to the men. We lighted fires round the wounded and I was kept going all night. All that my haste to dress had left me to stand in were my socks, trousers and hat. The Boers got £9 as well. That was nothing though, when I got my carbine back. Oh, it was an awful night. Fourteen of our men dead, between 40 and 50 wounded, and 124 horses and mules killed in addition to a lot of animals wounded. Blood was everywhere. There were 38 horses shot in the companies' lines. The Boers took lanterns and gathered up the loot, then marched the prisoners a long way out and let them go. General Muller was in com-

¹ In *My Reminiscences of the Anglo-Boer War* (1902).

mand and most of the Boers behaved very well after the fight was over. When the firing started the horses stampeded on top of the men.

'Dr Patterson did not arrive until later in the morning with the ambulance. Three more men died next day. We buried 18 of our men and Captain Watson of the Royal Artillery, one Kaffir, and one Boer in the same grave. I forgot to mention that in the morning four Boers came to within 500 yards of our camp and took cattle away. They went round by Lieutenant Cotton's party, who opened fire on them and shot General Grobler dead and got the cattle back.'

Kitchener mentioned the wounded veterinary officer, Captain Samuel Sherlock, in his despatches on 8 July 1901. Trooper J. J. Peters ably supported Sherlock. The despatch read: 'When the doctor was killed Captain Sherlock took charge of 40 wounded, and by his skill and attention, much alleviated suffering and danger. An excellent officer in his department.'

For the next seven days after the action at Wilmansrust, the column stayed south of Middelburg, in frequent contact with the enemy. The Victorian survivors, being without horses, were forced to march on foot. It was at this time, during the course of a day's march, that General Beatson in the presence of his officers revealed his opinion of the Australians under his command. 'I tell you what I think. The Australians are a damned fat, round-shouldered, useless crowd of wasters,' he said. In the face of protests from his Australian officers, the General went on to emphasise his remarks: 'In my opinion they are a lot of white-livered curs.' Seeing an Australian officer getting the remarks down, Beatson said: 'You can add dogs too', claiming that all Australians were alike.²

On the fourth day after Wilmansrust the column camped near a large farm where the Australians were given permission to slaughter some pigs. Beatson happened to pass by just as the men were bayoneting the pigs, pausing just long enough to repeat his previous remarks: 'Yes, that's about what you are good for. When the Dutchmen came the other night you didn't fix bayonets and charge them, but you go for something that can't hit back.' So by the time the column returned to Middelburg the Australians had lost faith in a commanding officer who regarded them with complete contempt, as the General's remarks made in the presence of the Australian officers had filtered right down through the ranks.

On 7 July the order came through that the men were to march again that night. A discussion followed within the ranks on the question of piling up their rifles in preference to marching out with Beatson. It was reported that Trooper James Steele had said: 'It will be better for the men to be shot than go out with a man who would call them "white-livered curs". I would think more of them if they would throw down their arms and refuse to go out.'

² *Age*, Melbourne, Oct 1901.

³ *Age*, Oct 1901.

Steele had previously served with a South African regiment for 10 months before returning to Australia and enlisting with the Fifth Victorians.

Troopers Arthur Richards, Herbert Parry and Steele were arrested. On 11 July they were tried by court-martial for inciting mutiny and found guilty. Although the three men were ordered to be shot, Kitchener commuted the sentence to 10 years imprisonment in the case of Steele, and to one year for Richards and Parry. They were kept in custody for a month before being transported to England. Steele was sent to the military prison at Lewes, Richards and Parry to the prison at Wakefield.

Australians resident in London reacted quickly by sending a petition to the King, seeking their release. Questions were asked in the Australian Parliament. The Australian Government began to make enquiries from the British Government. When the men had been six weeks in the English prisons, the War Office issued an instruction for their immediate release. The three men returned to Australia before the end of the year.

Meanwhile on 8 November 1901 Mr Barton, the Australian Prime Minister, had received a reply from Mr Chamberlain to his cable sent on 2 October: 'Referring to your telegram of 3 October, Privates J. Steele, A. Richards, and H. Parry were tried by field court-martial for inciting to mutiny, and sentenced to death. Sentences were commuted to 10 years' penal servitude in the case of Steele, and one year's imprisonment with hard labour in the other cases. The prisoners were sent to this country (England) but on receipt of the proceedings of court-martial, the Judge Advocate General declared there were legal flaws in the convictions, they having been tried under the wrong section of the Army Act. Instructions have been issued for their immediate release, and their journey to provisional battalions at Shorncliffe.'⁴

The Australian Prime Minister tabled a report in the Parliament received from Major McKnight, covering every aspect of the Wilmansrust affair. As the British Government had already quashed the sentences, the full report was never made public; in particular the sections relating to General Beatson's attitude towards the Australians, and the mutiny and subsequent courts-martial.

The Fifth Victorians left South Africa with a record of service and a reputation equal to the other Australian contingents. One member, Lieutenant L. C. Maygar, was awarded the Victoria Cross. But Beatson's allegations unjustly tarnished the unit's name for some time. That some unwarranted assumption did gain credence is clear from the rejoinder made by a 'Tommy' garrison on being pressed to surrender along the Delagoa Bay railway near Balmoral. The Boers called on the soldiers defending a block-house to surrender. The reply of the garrison was: 'You haven't V.M.R.'s

⁴ *Age*, 8 Nov 1901.

to deal with this time.' As things turned out, the Tommies did surrender in the end, but not until the burghers actually poked the muzzles of their rifles through the loop-holes in the walls of the blockhouse.

The Victorians and Beatson parted company on 10 August 1901 near Bronkhorst Spruit. The contingent marched to Witbank where they entrained to take part in operations against Louis Botha in Natal and Zululand, making Newcastle the base headquarters. At Reitulei they camped at 'Good Hoek', Louis Botha's farm, which was blown up. The contingent took part in a number of engagements near Vryheid.

Acting on information that a number of Boers were occupying one of the few unburned farmhouses in the area at Majeskop, a patrol set out on the night of 4 November. In an attempt to surprise the Boers an advance party of 20 men went ahead. In the last stages of the approach to the farm five men were left with the horses. The other 15 rushed forward. Near a wall they stumbled upon some of the enemy sleeping upon heaps of bridles, saddles and equipment. The men were held captive but barking dogs alerted the 60 Boers inside the house. Heavy firing began from the farmhouse followed by fierce individual duels in the surrounding garden as Australians and Boers stalked one another in the garden shrubbery. The arrival of 48 additional men of the patrol caused the Boers to retire leaving the Australians in possession of the farmhouse, found to be full of all manner of British equipment—miscellaneous loot gathered from captured convoys.

The Australians learned also that earlier in the night many more Boers had used the house when plans were discussed and orders given for the following days. In the action the Australians lost Lieutenant J. G. Chrisp, Corporal Henry Harrison and Trooper F. H. Caghey killed, four others receiving wounds. Most of the Boers got away leaving behind three dead, one wounded, and 12 taken prisoner. Before the Australians left the scene they burned the house.

On 23 November the Victorians took part in an engagement at Geelhout Boom in Natal. On that day Lieutenant L. C. Maygar went forward to order the retirement of a detachment in danger of being outflanked. As the troops galloped back across the open veldt, Trooper A. J. Short had his horse shot from under him. On seeing this Maygar dismounted and despite the heavy fire, some coming from as near as 200 yards, succeeded in lifting the injured man on to his own horse which bolted into some boggy ground.

When Maygar got the horse out of the bog he found that it was not capable of carrying them both so he put Short up in the saddle and sent him galloping back to cover. Returning to camp on foot Maygar successfully ran the gauntlet to reach cover unscathed. In Pretoria on 8 June 1902 General Kitchener decorated Lieutenant Maygar with the Victoria Cross.

¹ B. J. Viljoen, *My Reminiscences of the Anglo-Boer War*, p. 383.

CHAPTER 20

The action at Gun Hill and the blockhouse system

In despatches sent to the War Office on 8 July 1901 the Commander-in-Chief estimated that 13,500 Boers constituted the hard core of the enemy force constantly in the field. They carried on hostilities, he said, 'without retaining anything or defending the smallest part of the country'. Kitchener contended that the burghers and their leaders by continuing to fight on rather than submit when the conflict could have only one end were 'only causing so much devastation of the country, and distress to their own families'. The hopes of the Boers were frequently buoyed up by the success of raids against isolated columns or garrisons, none of which weakened the hold of the British on the country. Their one hope rested in a slackening of the British resolve to see the matter through.

In despatches dated 8 August Kitchener referred to a night assault carried out by 200 South Australians on a farm called Grootvallier near the Vet River in the Free State. The farm was being used as a laager by the commando led by General Smuts. On the night of the attack, however, the general was not present. Led by Major J. S. M. Shea, an officer from the 15th Bengal Lancers, the South Australians attacked the farm on 1 August. Having silently surrounded the position the Australians were held up by

wire fences when they attempted to ride down on the laager. Forced to dismount, they rushed forward on foot with bayonets fixed.

Nearly all the 300 burghers got away in the darkness. Five Boers were killed in hand-to-hand fighting at the farmhouse. Eleven prisoners were taken, including Field-Cornet Wolmarans of Potchefstroom. The column commander, Colonel De Lisle, said that 'the very dashing night attack at Grootvallier was worthy of the best traditions of the Australian troops in the war'. Captain J. A. Watt and Lieutenant S. C. Macfarlane were mentioned in despatches 'for gallantry and fearless leading in the attack'. Trooper Phillis Brandt was named for gallantry. Trooper Thomas Kermode, Fifth South Australian Contingent was mentioned 'for conspicuous gallantry in attack on Grootvallier, 1 August 1901. He was the first man in to the farm, and bayoneted the first man, and although wounded in three places continued to fight.' Trooper Kermode was awarded the DCM.

After having survived the great drives launched by General French in the eastern Transvaal in the autumn, Botha returned to winter on the high veldt between the railways from whence he had been temporarily driven by French.

In the spring of 1901 Botha started out from the vicinity of Ermelo with the intention of entering Natal. By 17 September he was across the border with 2,000 burghers. The frontier, however, was too well defended and the enterprise failed after attacks against two strongly fortified posts, with heavy losses to both sides.

In documents that fell into the hands of the British, Botha had written: 'It was impossible for my commandos to enter Natal, because the enemy was aware of our plans, and he already had troops just opposite all the drifts of the Buffalo River. We had especially unfavourable weather; for 11 days it rained almost day and night. This weakened our horses very much, especially as we had to keep them tied up all night.'¹

General Botha returned to the eastern Transvaal with a small commando. From 19 to 24 October he rested at a farm named Schimmelhoek, 20 miles east of Ermelo. When Kitchener learned of the location of Botha's camp, he sent two columns each of 1,000 men to try and capture him. The columns, one under Colonel Sir Henry Rawlinson and the other led by Lieut-Colonel M. F. Rimington, left Standerton on 19 October, and arrived at Amersfoort from Paardekop on 21 October.

By means of night marches the columns reached the neighbourhood of the farm on the night of 24 October. Rawlinson took up a location to the north between the farm and Ermelo. Three hundred burghers were between him and Botha. Marching at midnight to avoid protective outposts, Rimington reached a hill overlooking the farm by 7 o'clock on the morning of

25 October. His force consisted of 485 men of the 6th Dragoons, and 545 men of the Third New South Wales Mounted Rifles. But the Boer scouts were vigilant enough. Rimington and his men were in time to see Botha galloping northwards with his staff.

It was a narrow escape for the Boer leader. In his despatches of 8 November 1901 Kitchener reported to the War Office: 'Colonel Rimington after a long night march, surrounded a farmhouse near Schimmelhoek where the Boer leader was stated to be camped. The operation was a difficult one. Between the columns and their objective a force of 300 or 400 had been collected and smaller posts were guarding the farm on all sides at a considerable distance from it. Rimington's column was to make for the farm, avoiding the laager and the main posts, while Rawlinson moved between Ermelo and the farm.

'Our information was good and the operation was well carried out by both columns, but it was too much to hope that the surprise would be complete. When Rimington's troops rushed Schimmelhoek, they captured only four prisoners and some of Botha's papers and personal property which he had left behind in a hurried departure. The main laager also received information of the approach of our columns, and retreated north towards Lake Chrissie without being engaged. Pursuit was useless.'

During the absence of Botha from the eastern Transvaal a British column, commanded by Lieut-Colonel G. E. Benson, earned a reputation for the manner in which it carried out a number of highly successful dawn raids, the outcome of swift and purposeful night riding that found the burghers within the laager before they could become mobile. Colonel Benson was the officer who had so unerringly guided the Highland Brigade towards Magersfontein.

After his escape from Schimmelhoek Botha assembled a commando and waited for a favourable opportunity to deal with Benson. Evidence gleaned from prisoners made Benson aware of the particular interest held by the enemy in the movements of his column. On 28 October the column reached Zwakfontein, 15 miles north-west of Bethal, in pouring rain. On the following day the force remained stationary. With supplies running low, Benson then decided to head for Brugspruit on the Delagoa Bay railway 34 miles away.

At 5 o'clock on the morning of 30 October the convoy of more than 300 wagons and 600 infantry began moving across the undulating veldt. Benson's striking force consisted of 800 mounted infantry, including several squadrons of the 2nd Scottish Horse.

The Marquis of Tullibardine raised the Scottish Horse from members of the London and Scottish Highland Society and from Scotsmen from Victoria, or Victorians of Scottish descent. Authority was granted in Victoria

¹ Kitchener's Despatches to the War Office, 8 Nov 1901.

for the selection of 250 men. They were in fact mostly men who, having passed the tests for the Fifth Victorian Contingent, found themselves eliminated by the final ballot.

In rain and thick mist the convoy ploughed through heavy muddy surfaces, harassed on all sides by sniping from 500 burghers under General Grobler. The beginning, at 8 o'clock, of the difficult passage of a deep drift slowed the convoy so much that Benson decided to camp at a spot five miles ahead, sending Colonel Wools-Sampson, his Intelligence officer, forward with infantry and wagons.

Meanwhile two of the last wagons bogged down in the drift. At the same time the attacks on the rearguard increased resulting in the mounted troops being heavily involved in holding them off. In the end the wagons were pulled out but the time occupied in doing so allowed the enemy to intensify the pressure on the rearguard. The danger went unnoticed by the main body because of its preoccupation with the job of making good progress towards the camp site and because of the constant rifle fire that had in any case been going on for some time.

Towards 1 o'clock Louis Botha arrived on the scene, having made a forced ride of 60 miles from the direction of Ermelo with 600 to 800 burghers. Taking full advantage of the mist and poor visibility caused by the rain and mist, the Boers charged into the rearguard. An urgent message to the camp brought Benson back with two squadrons of Scottish Horse. Quickly summing up the situation, Benson ordered a retirement to a broken ridge running east and west about 2,500 yards south from the camp. To cover the rearguard two 15-pounder guns were placed side by side in the centre of the ridge, which was the most elevated point in the defence position. The western wing of the ridge was taken up by the Mounted Infantry, which held out there all day. A company of the North Lancashire Regiment hastily occupied the eastern wing, 1,500 yards out from the centre. There they stayed, isolated and occupied with their own defence throughout the afternoon. Strongly pressed, the Scottish Horse made for the hill where the guns were. This position later became known as Gun Hill.

With the squally rain and wind blowing full in their faces, about 190 men on Gun Hill received little time to prepare for the coming onslaught. Drawn closest around the guns were 20 men of the escorting 60th Rifles. On the left of the guns were some of the Yorkshire Infantry and on the right 96 men of the Scottish Horse. The horses were all well to the rear. Although the veldt around was completely open on all sides the enemy benefited by local knowledge of the ground and skilfully made the best use of the folding contours to provide cover as they advanced.

Within a few minutes all but three of the 64 gunners were hit by converging rifle fire and the guns were silenced. Firing from the saddle as they

charged the Boers galloped down the last slope approaching Gun Hill and dismounted. They then momentarily disappeared from view in an area of dead ground within 40 yards of the shoulder of the hill. The surrounded soldiers kept up a rapid but declining fire, from behind nothing better than scattered ant hills forming poor protection against the rifles brought to bear on them. Two companies of infantry sent to reinforce the hill failed to reach a position from where they could contribute to the defence.

When few men capable of replying were left the Boers rose in lines, firing from where they stood at every living thing in front of them before running forward in triumph to formally take possession of the hill. In an effort to prevent the guns being taken away, gunners near the British camp dropped shrapnel immediately beyond the hill. In the meantime the burghers on the hill proceeded to loot and strip the dead and the wounded. At nightfall the Boers removed the guns.

The defenders of Gun Hill had fought almost to the point of being annihilated. Only 17 unwounded men got away. The 96 serving with the Scottish Horse were almost all Australians. Only six came through without being wounded, and 33 were killed. The Government of Victoria erected a memorial bearing the 33 names of the fallen Scottish Horse. It stands today in the Primrose Military Cemetery near Germiston, where the relics of the fallen men were reinterred. Although the guns were lost the delay caused by their defence gained time to establish the main camp.

The battle at Gun Hill took place on the land of the farm called Nooitgedacht. The newly established camp was actually near the boundaries of Nooitgedacht and two other farms—Schaapkraal and Bakenlaagte—but the action became known as the battle of Bakenlaagte.

Under the cover of night the ambulances visited the hill to bring in the wounded. Colonel Benson, wounded several times, was taken into camp on a stretcher. He died the following morning. The losses for the day were 238 killed and wounded and 120 taken prisoner—about a quarter of the total strength. The crippled column and convoy encamped behind barbed wire trenches from where they successfully beat off a night attack. The relief came on the morning of 1 November. The South Australians were the first to reach the camp, after a long hard ride of 75 miles.

Good fortune and a wound that was not serious resulted in Captain A. C. Murray being the only officer on Gun Hill capable of remaining in the field and able to take part in the defence of the entrenched camp. Hit by a bullet on Gun Hill that tore a big hole in the calf of his leg, Murray described it as just about the best place in which to be shot. In a long and informative letter posted home to Victoria, he said that Gun Hill was a very bad position that had to be fought for in order to try and save the guns. He wrote: 'It was a very bad position, but we couldn't leave the two 15-

pounders. So I left my horse, then shot in four places, and got the men into firing line. We couldn't see the enemy after they galloped down that last slope, until they were within 40 yards. The men ran from ant hill to ant hill and kept up a rapid fire. They poured in fire with the greatest daring, the leaders walking slowly at the head of their horses, waving on their men with carbines and short whips. At one time I had a regular duel with a man leading a grey horse and who walked up that slope as though going to a picnic and was tired. I fired at him and the bullet must have gone close for he looked round, saw me and fired at me. I heard his bullet and let go again. He was aiming at me for the third shot when I fired my third shot and he fell. I cannot say whether I hit him or not, as the fire was terrific.

'When he fell I looked round and saw the Boers swarming on our flank as thickly as in front and felt that it was all over. Just then I saw Lindsay clutch at his breast and collapse. Firms on my left, rolled over in convulsive struggles. Men all round were giving half-jumps into the air and rolling over, some with screams and groans, but all who could fought on. I felt a bullet go through my clothes and burn me, as it seemed. So severe was the shock it almost knocked me over. But the end was not yet. For what seemed an eternity the desperate men fought on. All the gun horses were shot. The gunners twice fired before they were killed. Like everyone else, they simply died at their posts. Then an explosive bullet struck my legging, spread out, and tore a hole in my right calf. The shock is wonderful.

'I suppose I fainted, for I do not know anything that happened afterwards, until I heard a voice asking "Are you badly wounded?", and looking round after getting to my knees, I saw a young Dutchman stripping a wounded man. I strove to think out the position, and in a minute or two struggled to my feet. My hat, spurs, carbine, bandolier, revolver and belt were gone. Seeing a man riding about I hobbled up to him, and asked if he was a commandant. He was civil and when I said I would like to look after the wounded he said he would see I was not interfered with. He also promised that he would try to keep his men within bounds and stop the looting and undressing of wounded. Then he remarked: "Your General Benson is wounded badly", and pointed out the Colonel leaning on his arm. I went over and asked if he was badly hit and he said: "Yes, in the leg and through the stomach." He looked awful and I felt there was no hope for him.'

Murray finally met an officer, Lieutenant A. T. Wardrop, walking about in a dazed state. He had been shot through the arm and the shoulder. Together they got to a farmhouse nearby that they found already occupied by a Boer picket: 'They stripped us of everything we had on that was any good and gave us in return some filthy rags.' Murray continued: 'This picket kept us all night huddled in a small mud room, with sheets of galvanized iron forming a roof. Bad as it was, we were lucky to be there as a

tremendous thunderstorm burst over the place and the rain poured in torrents. Imagine the poor wounded fellows out all night lying exposed to it all.

'With the first signs of dawn we got out and found the Boers had left. Some of our men started to struggle back into camp, very sparsely clad. None had boots. There were eight of us altogether, three wounded—Wardrop in an arm and shoulder, a private of the Mounted Infantry shot through the thigh, and myself. There were also two officers, one from the Mounted Infantry and one of the Buffs, who had been made prisoners and later released. One of the men rigged up a white flag so that we would not be fired on by our own pickets.

'But oh, the scene on the battlefield. The Dutch were not only robbing the wounded and dead of valuables, but of clothes . . . most of the dead were stripped quite naked. It was an awful sight when the sun broke through the mist and shone on the green ridge, to see the white glistening bodies lying dotted about on the green. Where the guns had been there was a white patch formed of the naked bodies of the many poor fellows who had fought their last fight there.

'Major [F. D.] Murray was there, shot through the forehead and stomach, Captain [M. W. H.] Lindsay through the heart and right breast, Captain [A.] Inglis through the head, and so on. All dead. And all stripped naked by these savage brigands, who have been sympathised with by people who ought to know better. Lieutenant [J. B.] Kelly was so riddled with bullets that his clothes were not worth taking, they were left on him therefore.' In addition to Kelly, F. D. Murray, Lindsay and Inglis, Lieutenant C. Woodman, another Australian, was killed at this time.

Captain Murray estimated the Boer losses to be 60 killed and 130 wounded. Later he was selected to attend the coronation of King Edward VII at the head of a detachment of the Scottish Horse.

Before the end of 1901 when the Boers had lost nearly all their artillery a bullet-proof blockhouse system, constructed by Kitchener for the protection of the railways, reduced to a minimum the number and effect of the Boer raids on the tracks. 'Blockhouses are built in all shapes and sizes (wrote Sergeant McPherson, a Victorian serving with the Scottish Horse) and placed in the most prominent positions to guard the lines. They are made bullet-proof by having an inner and outer lining of galvanized iron about eight inches apart, the space between being filled with small stones and dirt as concrete. These are impervious to a rifle bullet. The houses are loop-holed all round so as to command the country from all sides. The loopholes are just large enough to put the rifles through, and have an angle of 45 degrees. To make the blockhouse still further secure a trench three feet deep is dug all round and it is by way of this trench the blockhouse

is entered. The whole is further protected by barbed wire entanglements, so cleverly made it would take a man unmolested 20 minutes to cut a way through it. Ample room is left between the wire and the blockhouse for the guard to enjoy themselves when off duty.

'Each blockhouse is connected with the nearest depot by telephone to enable it to obtain assistance if required. In case of the wires being cut each garrison can signal by firing rockets. Such signals are passed from house to house until they reach the nearest depot. Then up comes the armoured train to where the assistance is required.

'The train consists of an engine in the centre of six armoured trucks, with a naval 12-pounder gun in one of the end trucks, and three or four Maxims scattered in the others. All the trucks are bullet-proof and the trains are always in readiness. Each train has a search-light. There are 100 men on each train.'

The system became so successful that before long the iron blockhouses were being mass-produced; parts and sections were railed, carted and erected in long lines across the country where there were no railways. Interlocked with five-stranded barbed wire fences and cross-connected by telephone, they were placed at intervals of about half a mile or in such a manner that one was always within sight of another.

In the end, no less than 10,000 of these small forts, each with a garrison of seven, stretched in lines over the two former Republics. The blockhouses did not stop determined bands from crossing the lines, but they considerably reduced the area of space in which they had to manoeuvre. The system disrupted intercommunication between the Commandants and diminished the ability of the commandos to unite at a given point. They also gave some protection to the lines of supply, thus partly removing the necessity for columns to travel encumbered by long lines of wagons.

Although the earlier efforts of the Burgher Peace Committee had come to nothing there were many surrendered burghers in the camps who continued to believe that the resolve of the burghers in the field to continue fighting was not in the best interests of a country already devastated and with no hope of driving the British out. In the last quarter of 1901 a number of these burghers volunteered to fight on the British side, under British control and in British uniforms. By the end of the year nearly 2,000 burghers known as National Scouts and drawing army pay were attached to British columns. Based in small groups with the columns they specialised as scouts. Piet de Wet, brother of the will-o'-the-wisp Christiaan de Wet, became a National Scout; Christiaan vowed angrily that if he ever met his brother he would shoot him down like a dog.

Boer hopes continued to flicker momentarily here and there by the capture of a British convoy after defeating the escorting troops or by

falling on and overwhelming the camp of some isolated trekking column. More than one roving commando remained at large in the Cape Colony midlands. In September 1901 General Smuts crossed the Orange River with a small commando. By keeping generally to the mountainous areas, he arrived at one time within sight of Port Elizabeth. With the addition of other small groups coming down from the former Republics the commandos gradually increased in strength. By raiding small towns and villages and pouncing on unwary columns they kept 8,000 soldiers busy trying to contain and capture them. Smuts and his commando moved across to the north-west of the Cape Colony and until the end of the war was a thorn in the side of the army.

Almost everywhere in the field the Boers were suffering intense privation. The womenfolk who stayed with them were also in a wretched state. When they became short of ammunition many of the burghers relied on captured Lee Metford rifles. The cartridges came from convoys, from prisoners, or otherwise picked up in deserted British camps and even from along the line of march after being dropped by careless soldiers.

In December General De la Rey reported from the western Transvaal: 'We still have a few guns left. Most of the Mausers have been exchanged for Lee Metfords. As for bullets I am just as well supplied as I was a year ago. It is the same way with Botha and de Wet and will continue to be so while England sends ammunition.'

The practice of the Boers of wearing British uniforms in the field was evident from the earliest months of the war. With the passing of time and the exigencies of the campaign, the need for replacing worn-out clothing became a real problem for the burghers. Consequently the practice of donning the British uniform became more widespread. At the end of 1901 De la Rey also said: 'As regards clothing. We are partly dressed in skins, others wear pieces of wagon covers or tents, but the great majority are dressed in khaki taken from prisoners of war.'

Needless to say the very use of the uniform by the enemy commonly deceived British patrols. Quite frequently the Boers set out to do so. More than one Australian either lost his life or was captured under such circumstances. 'At Jericho,' wrote Captain David Ham, 'a party of Boers rode up to a Queensland outpost, shot one fellow, and took the horses and arms of the others. They had feathers in their hats, and were dressed just as Queenslanders. The outpost thought it was a party of our own men.'

At about the same time as a patrol of Dragoon Guards, guided by Lieutenant Mackellar, was cut up at Onderstepoort near Pretoria by the enemy wearing British uniforms Trooper A. Steedman, serving with the Kaffrarian Rifles, a Cape Colony regiment, wrote to his home in New South Wales: 'Last Sunday week we camped in Johannesburg. On the Monday a big patrol was sent out to find a Boer commando supposed to be in the Klip

River district. We found them on Tuesday, and drove them from their position. Next day we went out to find them again. The lieutenant of my squadron and myself were out scouting. As we went round a kopje we came face to face with a Boer picket. It was raining and the fog was very thick. The picket of about 30 men challenged: "Who are you?" I said, "Kaffrarian Rifles." These men were in khaki and spoke excellent English. As soon as I said "Kaffrarian Rifles" they fired a volley into us. We galloped round the kopje and were soon out of range.'

A few months later on 29 September 1900 Major David Miller, a New South Wales Imperial Bushman, wrote from the Marico River district: 'These Boers have now adopted precisely similar formations, columns of troops, etc. to ours, the result being most confusing. They are also dressed in khaki.'²

Four Bushmen, serving as advance scouts with General Methuen's column on a march from Taungs to Klerksdorp, rode up to a small group of horsemen all wearing khaki, some in officers' coats and in one instance showing service medals. The decoy worked perfectly. From thick bush more than 20 Boers appeared, so the Bushmen were forced to surrender.

It was near Klerksdorp that Australian scouts under Captain Hasslet, an Imperial officer, had a fight with British uniformed Boers. The *Sydney Morning Herald* published an account from a Special Correspondent in August 1901: 'Coming towards them they saw 50 or 60 horsemen, a number of whom wore British cavalry cloaks, and as they advanced nearer it became easy to distinguish the khaki uniforms worn by the others. Convinced now that they had been fired upon by a British party who had mistaken them for Boers, Captain Hasslet and the others held up their rifles on their hats as a sign that they were friends. The Boers—for they were really khaki-attired Boers—accepting this as a sign of surrender advanced confidently. "Who are you?" shouted Captain Hasslet. "What the deuce are you doing firing on your own men?"

'The reply was in Dutch. Both sides instantly set to work, and the engagement was a decidedly vigorous one, both Boers and Australians taking such cover as the numerous ant hills provided. That it was fought from unusually close quarters may be realised from the fact that Sergeant J. Seymour actually struggled hand to hand with a Boer. At last the Boer freed himself sufficiently to enable him to get his rifle into a favourable position and pulling the trigger he saw the Australian drop to the ground shot through the heart.

'At the beginning of the fight a messenger had been sent to camp to report the affair, and in a short space of time, "C" and "D" Squadrons of the NSW Mounted Rifles were arriving at full gallop. No sooner did the

² P. L. Murray (ed.), *Official Records of the Australian Military Contingents to the War in South Africa*, p. 90.

Boers sight them than, mounting their horses, they started off helter-skelter. The Rifles chased them for miles, but the Boers were admirably mounted, and disappeared behind a kopje.'

Sergeant James Seymour served with the Third New South Wales Imperial Bushmen. The regiment was led by Major R. C. G. Carington and consisted of men drawn from the newly-arrived reinforcements for the New South Wales Imperial Bushmen and the New South Wales Citizens' Bushmen, both of which at the time were about to return to Australia.

General Kitchener referred in despatches to a fight between a squadron of the 17th Lancers and a commando led by General Smuts: 'On 17 September Smuts' commando arrived at Modderfontein, 18 miles north-west of Tarkastad, where the Boers made a most determined stand against a squadron of the 17th Lancers, under Major Sandeman, posted to close all egress to the south. The enemy being dressed in khaki were taken for our own troops, and got to close quarters before the mistake was discovered. Though taken at a disadvantage, our men offered a most gallant resistance, and worthily maintained the traditions of their regiment.'

After the fight a youthful burgher named Deneys Reitz paraded dressed in full Lancer uniform. 'We had not heard about Lord Kitchener's proclamation against the wearing of British uniforms', he wrote later 'and I went about wearing Lord Vivian's khaki tunic with regimental badge and buttons, and the 17th Lancers skull and cross-bones in my hat, not a little proud of my well earned trophies and never dreaming that I was under sentence of death.'³ (Reitz fought in the 1914-18 War, and in France in October 1918 he commanded the 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers. He died in London in 1944 while serving as South African High Commissioner.)

Not long afterwards, three advance scouts from this commando were captured after running into a British patrol waiting in ambush. Because they were wearing British uniforms they were immediately shot. Reitz told of another meeting with a British patrol: 'As they rounded a piece of thorn bush, they ran into a British patrol. So unexpected was the encounter that they were alongside before they could think, and Duncker on the spur of the moment called out: "Don't fire, we are 17th Lancers!" The officer in charge, a Captain Watson, said: "I don't believe you, all Smuts' men are dressed in khaki. Put up your hands." Then Coetzee and Duncker, both of whom carried Webley revolvers, fired simultaneously, killing Captain Watson and one of his men, and seriously wounding another who, however, got away with the rest.'

In the days ahead several other members of this commando found in khaki were taken out and shot as General Kitchener issued a proclamation

³ Deneys Reitz, *Commando* (1929).

ordering the execution of fighting burghers caught in the British uniform. Months later when they met, Smuts protested to Kitchener about the execution of his burghers. Kitchener defended the executions on the ground that by wearing the British uniform the burghers had brought about the death of some of his soldiers.

Corporal H. N. R. Mead, of the New South Wales Army Medical Corps, writing from Krugersdorp in the Transvaal on 11 June 1901, described an interesting encounter with General Smuts, who was destined to become a British Field Marshal: 'I have just arrived at this place which is on the railway line. I am in town before the rest of the troops, as I was sent in here with a doctor and 47 sick and wounded men, under the Red Cross flag, and no troops with us. A Boer commandant named Smuts, or some such name, with his commando stopped us and searched all the wagons, and he told me he would shoot me if he found any arms or ammunition, but he did not touch anything.'

CHAPTER 21

Australians as scouts and the great blockhouse drives

After the hard battles leading up to the relief of Kimberley, Lieut-General Lord Methuen remained in the western Transvaal where the Boer resistance continued under General De la Rey. From the latter half of 1900 to almost the end of the war Methuen's columns were rarely without a quota of Australians, with whom Methuen became a popular and respected commander. He in turn referred in complimentary terms to the value of the colonials.

At Klerksdorp in June 1901 an interesting incident took place when the General inspected the Australian lines. On this occasion three men were presented to him who had fought in the expedition led by Sir Charles Warren to Bechuanaland in 1884-85. In those days Methuen was still a Colonel. Lieutenant R. C. Holman, Lieutenant J. P. McColl and Regimental Quartermaster-Sergeant J. W. Wilson, had served under the Colonel in a troop known as Methuen's Horse. Despite the interval of the years the General remembered the Australians and surprised them by mentioning the particular company to which each man had belonged. Lieutenant P. W. C. Drage, who fell at Diamond Hill, also went with the 1884-85 expedition.

Staff-Sergeant William Winch, who served in South Africa with the

New South Wales Lancers, was another who in 1884 had enlisted to go to Bechuanaland under Warren. Before that he had fought against the Transvaal in the first Boer War in 1880-81. Staff-Sergeant H. T. Read, New South Wales Lancers was also no stranger to South Africa, having previously fought in the Zulu War in 1879.

Few Australians could have seen more service in South Africa than Lieutenant Holman, after arriving at Cape Town as Sergeant-Major of 'A' Squadron New South Wales Mounted Rifles in 1899. Beginning with the march from De Aar to Prieska on 30 December, Holman went with French's column to Klip Drift and on to Paardeberg and Bloemfontein. On 25 May he crossed the Vaal with the squadron and took part in the capture of Johannesburg and Pretoria. He was present at the capture of the heights at Diamond Hill and fell in with the pursuit of the enemy to Bronkhorst Spruit. He accompanied the squadron to the relief of Elands River Post following the first great exhaustive chase after de Wet. Mentioned in the Diamond Hill despatches, Holman later received the DCM.

The New South Wales Mounted Rifles returned to Sydney on 8 January 1901. On 15 March Holman sailed for South Africa again, this time with the Second New South Wales Mounted Rifles, disembarking at Port Elizabeth. On 11 May Holman was promoted to Captain. The contingent served in both the eastern and western Transvaal. For outstanding service in these campaigns Captain Holman received the DSO.

The contingent marched 4,000 miles in a year before sailing from Cape Town on 4 May 1902, although this was not unusual for an Australian column. The Fifth and Sixth South Australian Bushmen each marched 3,825 miles between 23 March 1901 and 27 March 1902. The men had not been three consecutive days in one place.

General Plumer was another commander who won the confidence of the many Australian and New Zealand squadrons in his columns. The General had earlier served against the Matabele in 1896. In that campaign he commanded a column of 850 colonial volunteers, whose ranks included a small quota of 22 Australians.

The story is told that one morning in the Transvaal the General's favourite horse was found to have mysteriously disappeared overnight. Before informing the General and knowing full well where the missing mount would most likely be found, his galloper searched diligently through the Australian and New Zealand lines without any success. When Plumer was at last informed of the theft he also had no hesitation in deciding where to look for the missing horse.

After quietly finishing off his breakfast he headed for the lines of the Australasians. The General wore his eye-glass through which his sight rested suspiciously on a dirty-coloured horse, over which a brief investigation took

place. The colour was shown to have been bestowed on a grey steed by the sagacious application of Condy's Fluid. Moreover, the numbers on the hoofs were well concealed with mud, the mane trimmed and the tail docked.

When the guilt of one particular trooper was firmly established the General, well aware that the Bushman had never done a day's foot slogging on the march, decided to punish him accordingly. So, never away from the eye of the commander, the Bushie walked alongside the column throughout a long day's march in full view of his mates passing along the line. General Plumer had well judged the antipathy of the colonials to walking. From that day they left his horses alone.¹

The value of the Australians as scouts had long since been recognised by every column commander. Captain R. C. Lewis, the Tasmanian Bushman, stated: 'It was admitted by military experts who had nothing to gain by buttering us, that the Australians were remarkably smart scouts.'

General Kitchener frequently mentioned Australian scouts in despatches. He recorded the names of Trooper H. A. Wilson, of the Victorian Mounted Rifles, and Trooper G. Davidson of the South African-raised Kitchener's Horse: 'On many occasions they showed exceptional skill and nerve. At a time when De la Rey and Beyers were on the Magaliesberg these men voluntarily and alone on several occasions took most important messages through the Boer lines.

'Trooper Charles Riddle, Sixth Imperial Bushmen, when a convoy to Ventersdorp was attacked, volunteered to carry a message through enemy lines from Ventersdorp to the officer commanding convoy and succeeded. Sergeant Frederick Williams and Trooper Hubert Porter, Fourth Imperial Bushmen, volunteered to carry despatches from General Plumer to General Beatson, a distance of 60 miles through the enemy's country. They got there and returned safely, though fired on, burning a Boer field forge en route.'²

Needless to say they did not all come back or return unscathed. On 12 May 1901 five Victorian Bushmen were sent to a long ridge to reconnoitre and when Trooper Charles Moore had his horse shot he took cover behind the body. From this position Moore took eight shots to kill his man but received a bullet through the waist after it first passed through the horse. Badly hit, Moore struggled back down the ridge, crawling on hands and knees for 1,000 yards before his mates found him. They put him up on a horse, holding him in the saddle for a mile, to get him to the shelter of a farmhouse. Moore died that evening.

The English war correspondent, Edgar Wallace, wrote about the characteristics of an Australian scout working with a column: 'That Victorian always comes. From the flanks or in front, or from the rear, he arrives and

¹ General Sir Charles Harington, *Plumer of Messines* (1935).

² Kitchener Despatches.

he has always got a story worth telling, and doubly worth hearing. As the column chases along the road at breakneck speed of three and a half miles an hour he drops down from the top of a kopje, and bumps into the advance guard. And he tells the officer commanding that force many things; there are Boers on the farm three miles ahead, or a Boer convoy is five miles to the left front.

'He is not a soldier as we in London know soldiers. He doesn't like shouldering arms by numbers and he votes squad drill "dam silly". He is a poor marching man for he has been used to riding. He rides firmly but not gracefully. They are very patient these Victorians, their training makes them so. They have got their own method of going out to fight, but that method is as distinct from the regular Tommy as Tommy's is foreign to the City Imperial Volunteer.

'That Victorian knows his rifle as the city man knows his walking stick. He feels neither contempt nor awe for it. It is his commercial asset, a domestic property. Perhaps he keeps his wife in dresses by shooting kangaroos. Perhaps he keeps himself in whisky by tracking wallabies. His equipment is scanty. He has a bandolier, perhaps a pouch, possibly a mess tin. Certainly a "billy".

'He sees most things and acts quickly. Before the "ping" of a sniper's bullet has died away he is off his horse and under cover. Then if the sniper is an intelligent man he won't move about much, for when that Victorian has located his quarry, he can lie quite still for an hour at a stretch, his cheek touching his stock, his finger resting lightly on the trigger.

'You can call him "scout", but he is a sort of a nurse who has the infant column in his charge and feels his responsibility. For days he will ride, a mote on the sky-line and then he will come tearing down to the trailing troops and jerking up his horse within a few yards of the road, will gaze approvingly on us as we pass him by. He will ride miles from the road and never lose himself once, that Victorian, and he sees lots and lots that the column never sees or dreams of.

'Out he goes to the dark unknown, with a lighted pipe between his teeth and his sooty "billy" chattering at his saddle. When he comes back he will know more about the farms within a 10-mile radius, their values, their possibilities as forage providers, and the loyalty of their owners than the smartest intelligence officer that ever wore a khaki yachting cap. He certainly will have a better idea of the topography of the country than the government surveyor, who prepares the maps we march by.

'Sometimes he stays out all night—the gay dog—and turns up in the morning after a night's debauch on rain-sodden biscuit and doubtful bully beef. Sometimes he doesn't turn up at all, and then Crooke-Lawless sends out an ambulance for him—and under the driver's seat is a spade.'

Good as the Australian volunteer was in action he was not easy to manage in camp for he did not take kindly to drill or the restraints of camp discipline. This particularly applied to the Bushmen and the other late recruits. In contrast to the earlier contingents, many of whom had previously served in the volunteer militia, fewer men in the succeeding contingents had experienced any form of military discipline other than in the brief month of camp life before sailing.

Edgar Wallace also wrote: 'On parade he is a unit and has to do as he is told and he is not quite used to submitting his will to those in authority.

' "Fours right!" he wheels round awkwardly. If he makes a slip he causes his horse to buck to cover his confusion. "Walk march!" He is off and he feels much easier. Then comes the splitting up of his squadron into little individual patrols and he breathes freely. For with a couple of kindred spirits on a scouting trip he is a man once more, with a soul of his own.'

There is also the testimony of Captain Lewis: 'The Australians had their defects of course. They were reckless out of season and any unnecessary rigidity of discipline galled them exquisitely. When they got into towns they were inclined to be harum-scarum, and hard to handle; but out in the veldt and at the head of a column in difficult country, they behaved like men, and fully deserved such credit as they got.'

British regular officers commanding the relatively undisciplined irregular colonial troops found that it was better to use a little extra tact—a little give and take—which properly dispensed yielded the best results. But the strict application of regulation discipline or any unnecessary sign of an overbearing attitude only made the men restive and resulted in a lessening of accord from within the ranks of the colonials.

When a Bushmen corps near Pretoria was preparing to leave for home at the end of their period of service an order came to march immediately in relief of a British column. The protests from the Bushmen lasted loud and long in what seemed to be the beginning of a mutiny. General Paget addressed the men without any good effect. The Bushies were paraded before General Plumer. The General explained that he was under orders to parade at 7 a.m. ready to march, and that he knew his Bushmen comrades would be there, ready to march with him. The cheering Bushies gave no more trouble.⁴

Trooper E. C. White, Third New South Wales Mounted Rifles, wrote about an incident that took place near Standerton: 'One day when we were practising extended order, and returned to the camp at 5 p.m. tired, orders came that we had to move off at 6 p.m. and for the following day one pound of flour was issued for rations. As there was barely an hour to cook

³ Edgar Wallace, *Unofficial Despatches* (1901).

⁴ See Harington, *Plumer of Messines*.

the ration (having no wood) and to saddle up etc., we refused to obey the command. The whole of the squadron ('A') struck. They lined up and the officers stated the case for the men. We were told to go back and that our case would be officially considered. In 60 seconds biscuits were allowed us, thus relieving the situation and putting an end to the strike.

'The Tommies were amazed at our temerity. They stood open mouthed as we told the officers we refused to obey duty unless we were given the biscuits. If they had, they said, been guilty of the same thing, 12 months imprisonment with hard labour would have been their lot.'

The scarcity of wood for fuel for cooking fires was always a problem, especially when on the march. Trooper John Weir, a Victorian, wrote that 'we have to boil our billies on cow-dung'.

The difference between a colonial officer and a certain type of regular Imperial officer was neatly drawn in an opinion printed in a news sheet put out by 'B' Squadron, Paget's Horse, forming part of a garrison at Lichtenburg. Giving the location as De la Rey's Farm, Lichtenburg, and dated Wednesday 13 March 1901 the comparison read:

'Now if there is one subject on which we are justified in a claim to speak with the authority of experience, even though it be the experience of amateurs, it is surely that of pickets. The observations which follow are not, of course, intended to apply to all regular officers, but only to those with whom we have come in contact.

'Until the time we left Mafeking for Elands River, it had always been our lot, when not posted by our own, to be posted by regular officers. At Vaal Kop, a day's march from Zeerust, we had our first experience of colonials. The regular officers had all followed the same plan. They had taken us up to the top of a rise or kopje, where we could have a beautiful view of the surrounding country, and could certainly see any of the enemy who might be disposed to amuse themselves by promenading up and down the open spaces in front, and could as certainly be seen by them, with ourselves and perhaps our horses also outlined against the sky, presenting an ideal mark for target practice. It is only fair to add that when circumstances made it advisable for us to be separated from our horses, they would be good enough to find a place where we could leave him out of sight behind a tree. But we have always had a suspicion that course was dictated by the manifest impossibility of tying a horse up to nothing.

'The colonial officer on the other hand took us up to the highest rise near, and he took us over it, just so far down the other side that no part of us appeared above the sky line. Then he looked about till he found a tree on the same level and said: "Now you stand in front of that tree and keep a sharp lookout, and don't move from it till your relief comes up behind you, or you will get shot, as I know there are snipers about!"

'Then he gave us some commonsense directions about giving the alarm etc. and from what quarter the enemy might be expected (which our regular officers never seemed to think of, perhaps because they haven't any ideas on the subject) but nothing about regulation paces, or beats or positions. Then off he went saying: "Don't leave the tree or you'll be shot, and we probably shan't know anything about it." And naturally of an accommodating disposition, we didn't.'

Australians returning home sometimes got into trouble, even before reaching the port of embarkation. One Bushmen contingent, travelling to a seaport by train, insisted on firing from the open trucks at everything they thought seemed a likely target. This wild behaviour had the effect of keeping the blockhouse system in a constant state of alarm and finally caused the stopping of the train. No amount of lecturing moved the Australians who found themselves bundled out of the trucks by an armed guard to spend the next 24 hours in a barbed wire entanglement. On the orders of Kitchener they were not sent forward until the troopship was ready to sail. Then they boarded a train which went direct to the wharf without stopping. (In the early months of the war it was not uncommon for the burghers to ignore warnings and waste ammunition by firing from train windows at ant hills, or any kind of target on the passing veldt.)

Homeward-bound Australians once caused a sensation at the office of the *South African News*, a pro-Boer Cape Town daily newspaper. The paper had previously published an article describing the Australians as 'the scum of the earth'. With over a year's service at the front behind them the men were in no mood to allow the editorial to pass as though it had escaped their notice. They planned a reprisal.

When a small party of Australians appeared at the office in a side street the manager, an Afrikaner, leapt out of the window and headed for the police station. Meanwhile the enraged Australians proceeded to turn the office upside down before the arrival of the police, overturning tables, chairs and desks, tearing down the gas brackets, and breaking the windows. The pro-Boer editor was later sentenced to a year's gaol for seditious libel of General Kitchener and the British forces.

The British Government allowed all volunteers who were homeward-bound the option of a complete new uniform and outfit or of taking the equivalent value in money. Some of the Bushmen elected to take the money, which they quickly spent and a number of men left for home in the same old ragged uniforms worn to tatters by their long service on the veldt.

All the Australians seemed to have acquired a better knack of accumulating souvenirs than almost anyone else. Dutch Bibles and things like teapots were taken from the farmhouses. Mauser rifles, seemingly unavailable to

¹ In the Africana Library, Johannesburg.

the Tommy, were so few that they were prized by the British officers, yet they were commonly carried aboard by the Bushmen, in particular, in bulky packages. Along the Australian coast Mauser rifles were sold at the ports for £5 each.

On the returning troopships the men did not always respond to the discipline imposed. More than one troopship captain came to regard the Australians as the wildest of all the troops carried. Captain Firth of the troopship *Fortunas* said: 'I used to hold a very high opinion of Australians, but if these Imperial Bushmen are a fair sample, then I am compelled to very severely change it. They are the roughest crowd I ever had anything to do with.'

On the *Fortunas* the troops not only complained about the food; there were protests too that some of the men were forced to sleep in horse boxes used for bringing horses out from England to the Cape. According to the Captain this happened because of their own choice when they declined to use hammocks in another part of the ship. The men also smarted under the accusation of having robbed the ship's canteen.

The troopship *Morayshire* returned to Australia in June 1901 with Major W. H. Tunbridge in command of more than 700 Bushmen. Although some of the men seemed to think that once South Africa was left behind they were free from any form of discipline, trouble did not break out until men were detailed to scrub the decks. They refused to do so. Ten of the leaders were immediately placed under arrest, court-martialled and sentenced to 42 days imprisonment. The men continued to refuse to carry out the order, demanding the release of the prisoners.

The following day about 20 men marched to the cells, broke the doors open and set the prisoners free. For the rest of the voyage they remained on parole, after a brief return to the cells. The cause of the trouble—the scrubbing of the decks—was dropped altogether. On the arrival of the ship in Sydney, the Commonwealth Minister of Defence, Sir John Forrest, received a report from Captain Ham and Major Tunbridge. On their recommendation the men were released on the grounds of previous good conduct in South Africa.

Some of the Bushmen, unable to settle down either because of the difficulty of getting suitable employment or simply the inability to adjust to civilian life, indicated their willingness to return to the war. As a result some hundreds of discharged men accepted the opportunity afforded by an arrangement between the Commonwealth Government and the Admiralty, resulting in what became known as Indulgence Passages. By this scheme the men paid one shilling and sixpence a day for each day of a return voyage on a troopship. The strict stipulation was that on arrival in South Africa every man must join one of the colonial volunteer regiments. The military

made certain of this by arranging for representatives to meet Indulgence Passengers at the wharves.

'A' Battery, Royal Australian Artillery, a New South Wales unit, arrived in South Africa on 5 February 1900. Eighteen months later the battery returned home, without once going into action as a complete unit and generally disappointed at the lack of opportunities for meeting the enemy. The unit, well disciplined and well trained, was the only Australian field battery sent to the war. It was first formed as a permanent battery by the New South Wales Government on 1 August 1871, as a result of the withdrawal of the British garrisons in 1870. 'A' Battery, the oldest regular Australian Army unit, recently commemorated 100 years of service, including the two World Wars.

The battery, consisting of six 15-pounder guns, left Sydney with its own wagons, carts and horses. Five officers and 170 men, all from New South Wales, went with the guns in December 1899. Three months later they were followed by a detachment of 43 reinforcements.

Stationed from the beginning in the north-west of the Cape Colony the battery was at first split up into three sections and stationed for some months between De Aar and Enslin. Driver William Wiseman wrote from Graspan on 19 February: 'We are thoroughly disgusted with the way we are being treated here. We are not doing anything. We thought we came to South Africa to fight, but if they keep us like they are doing we will not see a shot fired let alone be in action.'

The Battery re-formed and moved to Prieska. There followed a further six months of inactivity for the guns in an area where the work mainly consisted of rounding up rebels. Sometimes the men were used as mounted infantry on patrol duties. Gunner Laurence Loveday described the work in this way: 'We have just returned from a wearisome march through the Great Karoo Desert. We never had a fight all the time, only skirmishing.'

Driver T. M. Gillard wrote a little later from Prieska: 'We are still in the same place, and I believe we are likely to be until the war is over. One section of the Battery has gone back to De Aar, but goodness knows when we are likely to leave here. All our clothing is worn out, and we have no way of getting anything to replace it here. We were to have joined Major-General Hutton's Brigade, but as we were so far away from him it was deemed better for us to continue our march westward or else we might have seen some fun.'

Corporal Richard Higgins wrote to his sister: 'You need not be in the least afraid of me ever getting to the front for "A" Battery have no show at all. We are split into three parties, all in different places, with a 100 or so mounted rifles.'

The guns joined a column marching to Upington and Kuruman but few shots were fired in anger. When two of the guns returned to De Aar, the

battery became spread over a distance of more than 300 miles. Gunner Loveday explained: 'I have a nice prospect ahead of me in this trip up to where the Battery is. It is 300 miles from here, and we have to go by road as there is no railway. Twelve go as escort to bullock wagons that are taking up provisions. We are to act as mounted infantry.'

In 1901 a section of the unit took part in the hunt for de Wet from Hopetown. Gunner Loveday reported: 'We are in Orange River Colony, guarding a drift with two guns, as it is expected de Wet will endeavour to break through the cordon of troops surrounding him, and this is one of the few outlets. There are 40 of us with 50 horses under Captain Edward Antill. The remainder of the Battery is at Upington, with all the rebel prisoners numbering 800.' Lieutenant S. E. Christian was mentioned in despatches as: 'A very good Gunner and horsemaster.'

On New Year's Day 1902 three columns moved out from Ermelo, travelling east with the objective of pinning Botha's commando of 750 burghers against the Swaziland border. Major J. M. Vallentin of the Somerset Light Infantry led one of the columns, the three coming under the command of General Plumer. Vallentin had a mixed force made up of companies of the Buffs and Hampshire Mounted Infantry, a company of Yeomen, and 110 men of the Fifth Queensland Imperial Bushmen under Major F. W. Toll.

From early morning on 4 January Plumer's force with Vallentin's column in advance marched through broken country, meeting with only slight opposition. As the enemy retired before them, Vallentin left the Buffs to hold the main ridge in a group of kopjes at Bankkop, pending the arrival of Plumer with the main column. Vallentin went ahead with the rest of his force for another mile before deciding to halt for some hours on high ground. He posted his men along a semi-circular line of hills called Onverwacht placing the Yeomen in the centre, and 25 men of the Hampshire Mounted Infantry in close support. The Queenslanders took up the flanks.

Acting on a report that 50 Boers were in a kloof two miles ahead, Vallentin took a party forward to meet them over what was to him unfamiliar ground. Barely half a mile along the way they were surprised by 300 Boers riding out of a deep hollow, where they had been concealed. Outnumbered and driven back, the whole party made a stand on the ridge at Onverwacht, opposed now by over 500 burghers.

When the officer leading the Yeomen attached to the column's pom-pom gun was shot, the enemy galloped in from the front and the left to capture the gun but were stopped by the quick intervention of the Hampshires and the Queenslanders. Dismounting they were in time to stay and make a fight of it, covering Major Vallentin after he ordered the withdrawal of the gun which soon opened fire from the rear. The Boers, however, by

working round the flank again, forced the displacement of the gun and succeeded in shooting all the wheel horses. The gun then finished up in a donga.

Major Toll and his men, outnumbered by five to one, were forced to retire from the main ridge on foot, for the horses had already been taken well to the rear. During the retirement the Boers intercepted and captured a small party. All except Lieutenant B. W. Cook and two others were hit.

On the orders of Major Vallentin, the Hampshires and the Queenslanders, supported by a few Yeomen, made a last stand, almost without the benefit of cover on the confined knob of a small ridge. The enemy came on so strongly that on two occasions they succeeded in getting within 30 yards of the position before being beaten back. Two burghers fell only 10 yards out in front.

It was said later that the unusual vigour with which the assault was pressed may have been due in part to a case of mistaken identity. In May 1901 the Fourth Queensland Contingent, acting under orders, had sent the small town of Bethal up in flames after removing the non-combatants. The Fifth Queenslanders did not arrive on the scene until the town was well aglow.

Once the Boers had succeeded in working their way to the rear of the knob where they began shooting from 50 yards the position became hopeless. The field of battle then fell to the triumphant burghers who mopped up by taking prisoners and stripping the dead and wounded of most of their clothing, including their boots. Thirty of Vallentin's horses survived the action. These the Boers used to remove their dead and wounded. Nine Boer dead were found where they fell. The Boer leader, Commandant Oppermann, and the British officer in command, Major Vallentin, were killed.

The Boers with very little time to spare for lingering on the field, soon released the prisoners and departed, having come within range of Plumer's guns with the approach of the main column. The Fifth Victorians retrieved the pom-pom from the donga, dragged it up a low kopje and surrounded it with protective sangars. The pursuit of the enemy, led by Major H. G. Vials, a West Australian, failed to engage them again.

After his inspection of the scene of the fight, General Plumer assured Major Toll that his men had done all that could be expected of them. Major Toll was one of the prisoners briefly held and disarmed. The losses of the Queenslanders were 13 killed and 17 wounded. Several were mentioned in despatches by General Kitchener. Bugler W. N. Busby and Lieutenant C. G. B. Reese were mentioned 'for gallantry in action'; Sergeant J. C. Power (who was killed) 'for gallantry and good conduct in action'. Company Sergeant-Major F. B. Knyvett was awarded the DCM 'for coolness and gallantry in action'. Major Toll was commended 'for the resolute and capable way in which he led his regiment'.

The beginning of 1902 saw the completion of more blockhouse lines bisecting the country. In the north-east of the Orange Free State two lines of blockhouses which ran from the railway between Bloemfontein and the Vaal River stretched towards the east terminating at the Drakensberg mountain passes leading to Natal. The most northern line of the two went from Heilbron and Frankfort to Botha's Pass, the other from Kroonstad by Lindley and Bethlehem to Van Reenen's Pass, completing a rectangle approximately 65 miles by 140.

Early in February Kitchener stationed 9,000 men across the veldt between Frankfort and Bethlehem, a distance of more than 50 miles. In an unbroken cordon, the line began to advance west, pressing forward between the two great lines of blockhouses toward the main railway against a barrier of blockhouses and armoured trains. Within the tightening net Christian de Wet with a commando of 1,800 men manoeuvred for life.

Driving a large herd of cattle before him, de Wet headed south with the hard core of his followers to the blockhouse line between Kroonstad and Lindley, breaking through at midnight with a comparative ease that suggested a lack of vigilance unforeseen by Kitchener. A second party managed to fight their way across the northern blockhouse line. The remainder of the commando, penned in at last between the railway and the oncoming line of soldiers, were caught in the searchlights from the armoured trains. Many were cut down as they sought to find a way to safety, fearing the complete exposure that would come with the dawn. The majority were taken prisoner.

Kitchener then prepared to cast a net over the section of the great rectangle ending at the Drakensberg Range. Starting from near the railway along the blockhouse line from Frankfort to Botha's Pass, the drive swung gradually south towards the region of Bethlehem and Van Reenen's Pass between the Wilge River and Natal, its northern flank separated from the southern flank by 60 miles of broken country from Botha's Pass to Vrede and culminating at Harrismith. Kitchener also despatched a column from Kroonstad to secure the line of the Wilge River. At this time de Wet was with ex-President Steyn at Reitz, having fled there after his recent escape.

Quickly realising the danger of the column approaching from Kroonstad, he turned east crossing the Wilge into the area about to be occupied by the troops coming in from the north. Left with no other alternative than to break out of an area continually contracting with the presence of the soldiers, de Wet selected a position at Bothasberg, 20 miles south of Vrede. At this point he directed an assault an hour before midnight on 23 February. The occupying troops happened to be Australians and New Zealanders attached to Colonel Rimington's column.

Forming a link in the long chain of the advancing cordon the colonials had taken up a position for the night along two sloping hills between which ran a small spruit known as Hol. The Seventh New Zealand Mounted

Infantry, under Colonel F. S. Garratt, held the hill on the left of the spruit, their line extending over the spruit and up the next slope to a point where they contacted the left flank of the Third New South Wales Mounted Rifles, under Lieut-Colonel Charles Cox. The colonials were extended in entrenched posts about 30 yards apart, each post holding seven or eight men.

De Wet had almost 2,000 people accompanying him that night—900 fighting burghers, plus refugee women and children and old men, all seeking to escape from the contracting net. Making use of a herd of cattle both as a shield and a wedge against the colonial line, many of the burghers still faltered and turned back rather than face the rifle and pom-pom fire. Only about 100 went on to storm the New Zealand right flank.

Standing in the path of the men falling back, de Wet did all he could to arrest their retreat. In the confusion of the night with the faltering men threading their way amid the refugees and cattle, he dominated the astonishing scene, moving from point to point loudly urging, threatening, and not hesitating to press his authority by violently swinging his sjambok among the reluctant burghers. By such means 250 men were induced to return to the forefront of the fight.

Overwhelming the first New Zealand post they turned left catching the posts next in line on the right flank, overcoming them one by one, and forcing the surviving New Zealanders back against the nearest New South Wales posts. Colonel Cox swung his men around to meet the enemy, but the line was already breached. Through this gap de Wet and Steyn, with over half the burghers and a few refugees, poured through before the line re-formed. The burghers who could not be persuaded to rush the New Zealand posts were counted among the final tally of prisoners when the drive ended at Harrismith. Among them was one of de Wet's sons.

Warrant-Officer J. T. McColl, Third New South Wales Mounted Rifles, was mentioned in despatches 'for prompt initiative and good work in action on 24 February 1902'. The three New South Wales men wounded included two pom-pom gunners.

The thin line of 76 New Zealanders who for an hour and a half bore the brunt of the Boer assault lost 23 killed and 43 wounded. Fourteen Boers were buried on the field. Another 20 were found wounded.

When the men firing a pom-pom at cattle and Boers were shot after the gun jammed, two New Zealanders saved the gun. Captain A. R. G. Begbie, Royal Field Artillery, was shot through the heart. Begbie had left England with his battery before the outbreak of the war. He had served at the front continuously since the battle at Belmont in 1899. In June 1902 Kitchener mentioned him in despatches 'for very marked gallantry in action'.

A decorative border made of small, repeating floral or star-like motifs, forming a rectangular frame around the chapter title.

CHAPTER 22

The Court-martial and execution of Lieutenants Morant and Handcock

Towards the end of March 1902 the Australian Press began to publish strange reports in which it was stated that two Australian officers, Lieutenants Harry Harbord Morant and Peter Joseph Handcock had been sentenced by a general court-martial and shot. Gradually the outline of events filtered through, revealing what until then had remained concealed by military censorship.

The officers were executed in Pretoria on 27 February 1902 for the shooting of Boer prisoners. A third Australian, Lieutenant George Ramsdale Witton, received a sentence of life imprisonment. The Australian Government and the wife of one of the executed men were allowed to get the first news of the executions from the morning newspapers weeks after they had taken place. Moreover this happened without the slightest indication beforehand that either the men or their corps were in any kind of trouble, as indeed they had been during the past seven months. Soon after learning of his fate Witton arranged for two telegrams to be sent on his behalf; one to the Australian Government representative in Cape Town, and the other to a relative in Victoria. Notwithstanding official assurances neither telegram arrived.

Following the breaking of the news in the Press the Prime Minister, Mr Barton, cabled General Kitchener for details. Kitchener's reply, the first official intimation received in Australia, was published in the Press on 7 April 1902. In Britain where the news of the executions aroused wide interest, the Government announced in the House of Commons that in accordance with normal practice the court-martial proceedings would not be made public.

The Australian officers were members of the Bushveldt Carbineers, a specially raised corps. Formed in the early part of 1901, the corps operated from the town of Pietersburg in the northern Transvaal. The formation of the Carbineers derived from the offer of a locally-raised force capable of coping with small but troublesome bands of Boers in the outlying parts of the region.

The Carbineers first saw action in April 1901, when they joined Plumer's force on the march to Pietersburg. Kitchener appointed Major R. W. Lenehan, formerly of the First New South Wales Mounted Rifles, in command. Lenehan soon found that the local volunteers were fewer than expected. Therefore he recommended to Kitchener that Australians on the point of returning home and other colonials should be enlisted.

The Carbineers continued to accept men until July for special service in a particularly wild region known as the Spelonken and in the country reaching towards Komati Poort on the Portuguese border. Much of this district was in a particularly unhealthy malarial area. Even with the incentive of a specially high rate of pay of seven shillings a day, the total enlistment never exceeded more than 320 men over the eight months of its existence. Ninety per cent of these were Australians. The force included about 40 surrendered burghers from the refugee camps whose presence met with criticism from some of the Australians. Trooper Ronald McInnis (formerly a Tasmanian Bushman) expressed this feeling of resentment. To him it seemed 'out of all reason to expect the Britishers to serve with them. I do not think Kitchener would know or allow this insult.'¹

With a garrison in occupation in Pietersburg, the real duties of the Bushveldt Carbineers began. By the end of April the force operated in two columns, one from a post north of the town and the other under Lieutenant Morant, 30 miles to the south-east in a district known as Strydpoort.

A native of Devonshire with the experience of 15 years spent in the Australian outback, Harry Morant sailed for South Africa as a lance-corporal with the Second South Australian Mounted Rifles contingent. He always claimed to be the son of Admiral Sir Digby Morant but this the Admiral was to deny. From about 1884 Morant worked in the Australian bush, mainly on cattle stations droving and breaking in horses. In those years he

¹ Quoted from his published Diary in the Africana Library, Johannesburg.

became well known throughout the country both as a dare-devil horseman and a ballad writer. By reason of a reputation gained from breaking in wild horses and young unbroken horses bred on the cattle stations the name of 'Breaker' Morant became a byword in the eastern colonies, where he was regarded as the only Englishman capable of riding a buck-jumper like a native-born Australian. Under the signature of 'The Breaker' he contributed verse to the *Sydney Bulletin*. Within these columns his verse was contemporary with Henry Lawson and 'Banjo' Paterson.

Morant arrived in South Africa as a lance-corporal, but quickly rose to sergeant. The contingent disembarked at Cape Town on 25 February 1900 and arrived at De Aar by train on 6 March. Three hours later they were on the move marching to Britstown. In the area between Britstown and Prieska the rebels were gathering again. Field Marshal Roberts sent Kitchener from Paardeberg with a flying column to break up the concentrations near Prieska. After going to Prieska the South Australians returned to De Aar. From there they entrained for Norval's Pont, and joined the main army under Roberts at Bloemfontein. Morant impressed all he served under with his outstanding qualities as a horseman and his educated manner. On the road to Prieska and in the advance from Bloemfontein he was used as a staff despatch rider. The South Australians became attached to Colonel Henry's Mounted Infantry Corps, and fought right through to Diamond Hill.

After Diamond Hill Bennett Burleigh, a well-known correspondent for the London *Daily Telegraph*, was on the lookout for a top-class, daring type of Bushman rider to carry his despatches. He found that Morant carried out the role admirably. Burleigh was no doubt intrigued to discover that the devil-may-care horseman was something of a poet and that in the notebooks carried in his saddle-bags he jotted down lines of verse. The same saddle-bags also held small bound volumes of verse. Morant and Burleigh went through with Roberts to Komati Poort and with French over the mountains to Barberton in the eastern Transvaal.

Morant next obtained a lieutenant's commission in the South African Constabulary being raised by Baden-Powell, but seems never to have taken this up. Soon after, he asked for six months leave to return to England. There he met Captain Percy Hunt, an officer in the 10th Hussars. Hunt had previously been in South Africa with the Yeomanry and returned to that country before Morant. He wrote telling his friend that he had joined this special force—the Bushveldt Carbineers. In Cape Town, at the end of April 1901, Morant lost no time in enlisting in the Carbineers, following his friend Hunt to Pretoria and thence to Pietersburg.

In the Strydpoort district and beyond, Morant and his men, living as much as possible on the livestock and whatever else they could get from the countryside, patrolled lightly and swiftly in successfully cutting down

small roving bands of Boers. Morant reported to Major Lenehan; he praised the men, complained about the poor quality of the horses and acknowledged the valuable services given by the surrendered burghers, especially through their knowledge of local languages. The work of the Carbineers south of Pietersburg became so effective that the enemy began to transfer their activities to a base in the neighbourhood of Bandolier Kop, well to the north on the fringe of the Spelonken.

The Carbineers responded by despatching a small column of 50 men under Captain Robertson, a British officer, to deal with them. The detachment set themselves up in a farmhouse about 90 miles north of Pietersburg named Fort Edward, in honour of the King. With a show of ceremony the Union Jack was run up, the National Anthem sung and a salute fired. The troops received a special issue of whisky.

The Command also sent to Spelonken Captain Taylor, an officer of the Intelligence department, well experienced in the handling of natives. Captain Taylor had served under Plumer in the Matabele war and possessed a thorough knowledge of the indigenous languages. In the Spelonken he had no military authority. His role lay in the gathering of information and advising on the sending out of patrols.

Lieutenant P. J. Handcock, an Australian serving in the corps as a Veterinary Lieutenant, accompanied the party to Fort Edward. Handcock had been in the country since February 1900, when he arrived with the First New South Wales Mounted Rifles as a farrier-sergeant. His contingent joined Roberts shortly after Paardeberg in time to take part in the action at Poplar Grove. The contingent sailed for home after Roberts had relinquished his command. Handcock stayed in South Africa. For some time he served with the Railway Police in Pretoria. On 22 February 1901 he joined the Bushveldt Carbineers.

At Fort Edward matters soon got out of hand. Captain Robertson and his officers found themselves unable to maintain discipline. The men did more or less as they liked, once looting a rum convoy and paying particular attention to the seeking out of liquor stills on the farms. This was the situation on 2 July 1901, when information reached the Intelligence Officer, Captain Taylor, that six armed Boers were approaching the Fort with the intention of surrendering. Sergeant-Major Morison went out to meet them. An advance party under Sergeant Oldham, having made certain that the two wagons held no women or children, opened fire and shot the six Boers. Under whose orders the patrol officers acted was never clearly established.

Disturbed by the reports filtering through from Fort Edward, the Army held an enquiry. As a result, the detachment was recalled from the Spelonken. Captain Robertson and Sergeant-Major Morison were allowed to resign from the service unconditionally. Major Lenehan summoned Captain Hunt, Morant's English friend, and appointed a number of Australian officers to

re-occupy Fort Edward with an almost entirely different detachment. Lieutenant Morant was one of the new officers. Lieutenant Handcock, after being at the Fort in Captain Robertson's time, also served under Captain Hunt. By the last week in July the new garrison had fully taken up its duties.

Within a few days a convoy of stores arrived from Pietersburg. The officer in charge, Lieutenant H. Picton, an English officer, had a lot of trouble on the road when some of the escort rifled the rum supply. At the Fort Captain Hunt arrested a number of the same men for drunkenness, the liquor having been obtained from some unknown source. In fact it was some they had secreted from the rum stolen from the convoy. However the detained men broke out and rode to Pietersburg where they were arrested by Major Lenehan. Following an enquiry, the garrison and area commander, Colonel F. H. Hall, Royal Artillery, discharged them from the corps.

On 4 August Lieutenant G. R. Witton arrived at Fort Edward with another 20 men, bringing the detachment up to 70. For the first time Witton met Lieutenants Handcock and Morant. Africa had not been kind to Witton since disembarking at Beira with the Victorian Imperial Bushmen in May 1900. En route to Marandellas an inflamed knee became so infected that he could scarcely walk. He returned to Beira and Cape Town but resisted all efforts to send him home. While making a slow recovery he performed camp duties at the Australasian base camp near Cape Town. In June 1901 Witton obtained a discharge from the Bushmen and enlisted in the Bushveldt Carbineers.

At the time of Witton's arrival at Fort Edward the officer in command, Captain Hunt, was away on patrol. On the night of 5 August Hunt led the patrol against Viljoen's commando located in a farmhouse 80 miles south-east of Fort Edward. Hunt had 18 men with him, but Viljoen's commando numbering more than 50 was not caught napping. Charging across the front garden, Hunt reached the house with several others but was shot in the chest while firing through the front windows. He fell moaning to the verandah. Sergeant F. Eland, the son of a local settler, whose home was not many miles distant, also fell. He had previously seen service in Natal with the Natal Carbineers. Towards morning the patrol retired to Reuter's Mission Station, five miles away. There they waited while a messenger went to Fort Edward.

Trooper Yates, a Victorian, described his experience at Viljoen's farmhouse: 'About two o'clock in the afternoon word was received that the Boers were in a farmhouse 12 miles away. Nineteen men pushed out, and we got there at 11 o'clock. Pitch dark. Dismounted and tied up horses, leaving one horse-holder. Our Captain gave orders to charge the farm, but Johnny Boer was too fly for us.'

'We had to retire. They were three to one of us. We lost our Captain, and our Sergeant-Major was killed afterwards. I didn't know what to do. Bullets were whistling like hail. However, I lay down behind an ant hill. After about two hours firing ceased, and I got up, and was beating a retreat up a kopje, when I walked into five of them. One man clubbed at me with the butt of his rifle, and struck me on the arm, knocking my rifle out of my hands.

'The next two days I had a fearful time of it. They kicked and knocked me about something terrible. I was expecting every moment to be my last. On the third morning I noticed some confusion among the Boers, and presently I heard the crack of a rifle. Then the Boers scooted away, leaving me tied up to a wagon, stripped of my clothes and everything.'

As a result of the treatment he received, Trooper Yates spent the next few weeks in hospital.

The death of Captain Hunt made Lieutenant Morant the senior officer at the Fort. Taking every available man, Morant lost no time in setting out for Reuter's Mission. Along the way he met Lieutenant Picton, returning to the Fort with a patrol and prisoners. Picton joined forces with Morant, after detailing a small guard to take the prisoners in to Fort Edward.

Morant and Picton arrived at the Mission Station one hour after the burial of Captain Hunt and Sergeant Eland; the bodies had been brought from Viljoen's farm in a cart. Hunt had been found lying in a gutter near the verandah of the farmhouse, his body stripped of all clothing. His face bore the marks of hob-nailed boots; his neck was broken, and his legs had been slashed with long knife cuts.

At the mission, the Reverend F. L. Reuter was one of those who saw the mutilated body of Captain Hunt. The medical officer attached to the Bushveldt Carbineers, Civil Surgeon Johnson, attested that he thought Hunt had been murdered. The effect on Morant of the mutilation and death of his friend was considerable. He declared that henceforward the orders of Captain Hunt that no prisoners should be taken must be carried out.

Leaving a guard at the mission, Morant set out for Viljoen's farm the next morning. At the end of a hard day's ride, advance scouts discovered the commando laagered in the lee of some kopjes. Without waiting to effect a complete surprise, the impatient Morant opened fire and the laager was rushed. The Boers had time to mount and get clean away, leaving the laager intact. A young Boer named Visser was discovered hiding under a wagon. He had a wound in his heel.

On learning the next morning that the enemy was about to attack the weakened garrison at Fort Edward Morant decided to return immediately, delaying only to burn the contents of the laager. Half way through the day Morant ordered a firing party to shoot the prisoner, Visser. In a short consultation before the execution took place he justified the decision on the

grounds that Visser was from the commando responsible for the mutilation and death of Captain Hunt. He claimed to be following the orders previously given by Hunt about the taking of prisoners and emphasised that a jacket and trousers belonging to Hunt were found in the possession of Visser. He referred to Kitchener's proclamation that Boers caught wearing British uniforms were to be shot.

By the time Morant arrived back at Fort Edward the garrison was no longer in danger due to the presence of a convoy and escort from Pietersburg. Lieutenant Picton then returned with a convoy to Pietersburg, at the same time reporting the full activities of the recent patrol and the shooting of Visser. The report earned no official comment.

On the morning of 23 August Morant left the Fort with a small patrol to intercept eight prisoners from Viljoen's commando coming in to the post under guard. Under Morant's orders they were taken to the side of the road and shot within three miles of Fort Edward.

About a week later a report circulated concerning a missionary found shot along the road to Pietersburg about 15 miles out. Lieutenant Handcock, investigating with a patrol, found the body of a German missionary named C. H. D. Hesse. He had been shot while travelling in a Cape cart. The cart was slightly off the road, wedged between a telegraph pole and some trees. Not long afterwards, acting on a report that three armed Boers were riding in to the Fort, Morant took Handcock and several men to meet them. These Boers were shot. On the same day Major Lenehan arrived on a rare visit to Fort Edward.

Morant lost no time in persuading Lenehan to allow him to take a strong patrol in search of a small commando under Field-Cornet Kelly, which at the time operated from near the Portuguese border. Kelly, whose farm was situated close to Fort Edward, had an Irish father and a Boer mother. After fighting in the war he drifted back to the farm. With the advent of the Carbineers to the district he left the farm and took up arms again, rather than surrender.

Morant left Fort Edward on 16 September bearing orders from Lenehan that if at all possible Kelly and his men should be brought back alive. After a week's hard riding in rough country, the commando was located 130 miles east of Fort Edward. Leaving the horses two miles from the laager the patrol moved in on foot. Morant went forward to reconnoitre in the dark, leaving Witton with the men. He returned to set up posts very close to the laager and waited for the dawn. At four in the morning the patrol charged into the laager effecting a complete surprise. Morant took Kelly at gun-point at the door of his tent.

Two weeks after setting out, Morant and his patrol rode in to Fort Edward with Kelly and his commando and then took them safely in custody to Pietersburg. Colonel Hall, the garrison and area commandant, sent

Morant a congratulatory message on the success of his exploit. With his ears still ringing with the highest praise from Colonel Hall, Morant went off to Pretoria on two weeks leave. This proved to be the high-water mark of his military service.

Some idea of the conditions at Fort Edward at this time can be gained from the diary entries for the months of September and October of Trooper Ronald McInnis: 'September. We have been on short rations for several days, and now we are without biscuits, flour or sugar. No news of outside affairs any further than Pietersburg. We don't know how the war progresses, and don't care. Have not had a change of clothing for two months, and no soap for two weeks. October. Rations are finished except for a few biscuits, and we will be reduced to living on mealie pap if a convoy does not arrive soon.'

In mid-October 1901 the detachment in the Spelonken was suddenly recalled and Fort Edward abandoned. The troops did not occupy Fort Edward again until March 1902.

At Pietersburg on 24 October 1901 Major Lenehan and his officers were placed under arrest by Colonel Hall, acting under instructions from headquarters in Pretoria. When he returned to Pietersburg, Morant was also taken into custody. No charges were made at this time. These dramatic events headed by the arrest of the seven officers were a prelude to the setting up of a Court of Inquiry into the affairs of the Bushveldt Carbineers.

The War Office subsequently stated that on 8 October certain Carbineers being discharged at Pietersburg on the expiration of their service reported the irregular actions of the officers at Fort Edward in the preceding months.

For many weeks Major Lenehan and Lieutenants Morant, Handcock, Witton, Picton and C. H. G. Hannam and Sergeant-Major E. Hammett were kept in solitary confinement within the lines of the garrison. Lenehan protested vigorously without avail. He wrote without success to Kitchener asking to be allowed to inform the Australian Government of his position. Meanwhile the Court sat daily listening to statements from witnesses relating to the conduct of the Carbineers. Two weeks after being first detained the arrested officers were taken before the inquiry and informed of the charges against them. In December they once again appeared before the inquiry panel to hear the decision of the Court, that they were to be tried by court-martial. The inquiry found no charges held against Lieutenant Hannam or Sergeant-Major Hammett.

About this time, before the courts-martial began, Colonel Hall under whose general command the Carbineers were operating was suddenly removed from the Pietersburg post and transferred to India. The Carbineers were disbanded and replaced by a new troop called the Pietersburg Light Horse. On 15 January 1902, fully three months after the initial detentions, the accused were handed copies of the charges. On the same day they were

informed that Major J. F. Thomas, who in civil life was a solicitor, had been permitted by Headquarters at Pretoria to defend them. Major Thomas had served with 'A' Squadron New South Wales Citizens' Bushmen in the siege at Elands River Post. The trials began the following day in a tent.

In the absence of any official records of the court-martial proceedings, the account closest to the source is that given by Lieutenant Witton in his book *Scapegoats of the Empire*, published in 1907, five years after the war ended. Witton had seen certain papers taken back to Australia by Major Thomas.

The first case concerned the circumstances of the shooting of the prisoner, Visser. In reply to the question as to whether the King's Regulations were kept in dealing with the prisoner, Morant, hot-headed and impulsive, told the President that he carried no copy of the King's Regulations. In pointing out that he had fought the Boers outside barbed wire entanglements and not from comfortably on the inside, he said: 'We got them and shot them under the rule of 303.'²

Morant continued to maintain that he acted only as directed by his superior officer, Captain Hunt, whose orders were that no prisoners must be taken; that in Pretoria Hunt had received verbal instructions to this effect from Colonel H. I. W. Hamilton, military secretary to General Kitchener. Morant also asserted that when he disregarded orders and returned to the Fort with prisoners he had received a reprimand from Captain Hunt. Both Dr Johnson and Captain Taylor said they had heard Hunt reprimand Morant for doing so. Lieutenants Picton and Handcock also gave evidence that Hunt's orders were not to take prisoners.

Major Lenehan subsequently informed the Australian Government that Handcock and Morant had told him that they were informed by the Court that 'if they received orders from me to shoot prisoners, nothing could happen to them'.³ The officers however persisted in their statements that the orders came from Headquarters in Pretoria.

It is interesting to refer to the capture of several of the Second Queensland Mounted Infantry serving with Major-General F. W. Kitchener's column in the eastern Transvaal in February 1901. The Queenslanders after being taken in a skirmish at Swartz Kopjes, south of Dullstroom, were released three days later. Trooper C. B. Holme, recalling these events in later years, said: 'At about the time of the engagement the Queenslanders had instructions to take no prisoners.'⁴

The belief that their orders were that no prisoners must be taken seems to have been fairly widespread within the ranks of the Australians. Lance-Corporal Llewellyn Hughes, a New South Wales Bushman, wrote on

² G. R. Witton, *Scapegoats of the Empire* (1907).

³ In the Australian Archives; 1906 correspondence.

⁴ From an article in the *Star*, Johannesburg, 22 Sep 1913.

10 July 1901: 'I consider the war will last for some time under present circumstances, but there is an order from Lord Kitchener that no quarter be given the Boers from this out, nor to expect any, and to take no prisoners, with a view to bringing the war to an early close. This seems a bit rough, but I believe is the only solution to the difficulty.'

The Judge Advocate said that in dealing with Visser the accused were imbued by the spirit of revenge arising from the death of Captain Hunt; that Hunt had lost his life owing to the fortunes of war, and that Visser could not in any case be linked with Hunt's death. As for the charge of Visser having in his possession the khaki tunic and trousers, the Advocate dismissed this. He maintained: 'As regards the treatment of an enemy caught in the uniform of his opponent, it would have to be shown that he was wearing such uniform with the deliberate intention of deceiving.'

During the trial the enemy took advantage of the withdrawal from the field of Morant and his feared Carbineers by confidently attacking Pietersburg. The assault, which took place early one morning, concentrated at a point near the remount depot beyond which a number of small blockhouses barred their progress. The accused officers were given weapons and ordered to take part in the defence. The Australian Prime Minister, Mr Barton, was to tell the Australian Parliament: 'Between their arrest and the passing of sentence, the men were called on to serve, and did serve, in the defence of Pietersburg against Commandant Meyer.'⁶

Morant and Handcock fought fully exposed to the enemy from the flat roof of a blockhouse, near the central point of the attack. They shot some of the Boers down within a few yards of the blockhouse. In the afternoon the now disarmed officers returned to the Court, whose proceedings the enemy had so unceremoniously interrupted.

For the continuation of the Visser case the Court moved to Pretoria, to hear brief evidence from Colonel Hamilton. He denied ever having conferred with or instructed Captain Hunt concerning his duties in the Spelonken. At the conclusion of the case the Court withheld its verdict.

On the return journey to Pietersburg, undertaken by the prisoners in open sheep trucks in midsummer, they were again bidden to take up arms. At Warm Bad station armed Boers were reported near the railway. However the threat passed without hostilities, so the train continued unhindered.

Early in February the Court assembled in Pietersburg for the Eight Boers Case. The main facts were not disputed by the accused, Lieutenants Morant, Handcock and Witton. The defence pleaded that the Carbineers operated in a special area against a number of gangs of nomadic marauders, more like outlaws than organised commandos. This assertion seems to have

⁵ Witton, *Scapegoats of the Empire*.

⁶ *Parliamentary Debates*, 2 April 1902, Vol IX, p. 11251.

been substantiated by the case of Captain Hunt, and the treatment handed out to Trooper Yates by his captors. Then there was the incident involving Mrs Hayes, the wife of a storekeeper about 18 miles from Fort Edward. Witton wrote that following the billeting of Morant's patrol on the property one night the Boers retaliated by looting the premises. A burgher pulled the wedding ring from Mrs Hayes's finger.⁷ One writer had this to say: 'The enemies they had to deal with were not always members of regular commandos, but often leaderless gangs of ruffians not unacquainted with nefarious practices, and incapable of appreciating anything but the most arbitrary justice.'⁸

Captain Taylor said that, when Morant had brought in prisoners, he heard Captain Hunt say that he should not have done so. In his book Witton quoted, but did not name, a witness who heard Hunt say to Morant: 'What the hell do you mean by bringing these men in, we have neither room nor rations for them here.'

Morant and Handcock next faced the charges of having ordered the killing of the three Boers near Sweetwater's Farm. Morant accepted full responsibility. He claimed that the three men belonged to the party that had mutilated Hunt. Under cross-examination Morant's retorts were so bitter that the Prosecutor desisted. The court continued to withhold its findings.

Major Lenehan, commanding officer of the Bushveldt Carbineers, faced the charges of neglecting to report the shooting of a surrendered burgher serving with the Carbineers named Van Buren. In his defence Lenehan said that he arrived at Fort Edward on the afternoon of the day the shooting took place. He afterwards reported the incident of the shooting verbally to his superior, Colonel Hall. As this officer had since been sent out of the way to India the statement could not be substantiated.

The death of Van Buren occurred near Fort Edward during the time of Captain Robertson, when Lenehan was stationed at Pietersburg. Although no longer in the army, the former Captain Robertson gave evidence that Van Buren was reported to Lenehan as having been killed in action. According to Robertson, he had decided after consultation with Captain Taylor and Lieutenant Handcock that Van Buren should be shot, because of his well-known treasonable activities with the enemy. He had thought it would be better to send Lenehan a different report.

Captain Taylor, the Intelligence Officer in the Spelonken, appeared next before the court accused of instructing the patrol so that they shot the six Boers as they approached Fort Edward to surrender. This took place on 2 July, before the arrival of Morant and Hunt. Taylor said that he had no

⁷ Witton, *Scapegoats of the Empire*.

⁸ J. Stirling, *The Colonials in South Africa, 1899-1902*, p. 280.

military command other than the responsibility for receiving Intelligence in the area. He could throw no light on the shooting of the six Boers. The court found Captain Taylor not guilty.

On 17 February 1902 the hearing began of the last listed case, in which Lieutenant Handcock was charged with the shooting of Hesse, the German missionary. Lieutenant Morant stood charged with having instigated the crime. Morant said that before the shooting of the eight Boer prisoners on the early morning of 23 August he had seen Hesse talking to the prisoners. He had told him not to do so. He denied having had anything to do with the shooting of the missionary.

A Trooper Phillip gave evidence that on 23 August, while he was on post duty, Hesse passed along the road between 10 a.m. and 11 a.m. travelling towards Pietersburg. The missionary held a pass bearing Captain Taylor's signature. Hesse told Phillip of the shooting of some Boers. Corporal Sharp said he saw Morant talking with Hesse on the road. Sharp and two other witnesses said that after this Handcock left the Fort on a chestnut horse. He was armed with a rifle. A native witness said he had seen an armed man riding along the same road that the missionary had taken. After hearing shots the native found the body of Hesse's coloured boy at about 2 o'clock. He then fled from the scene.

Lieutenant Handcock gave evidence that he left the Fort on foot on the morning of 23 August. Taking a branch road from the main Pietersburg road he walked across country to the farm of Mrs Schiel, three miles distant from the Fort. Mrs Schiel was the wife of Colonel Schiel who, after the battle of Elandslaagte in 1899, became a prisoner of war at St Helena. Mrs Schiel confirmed Handcock's statement that he had lunched at the farmhouse before leaving in the afternoon. A Mrs Bristow, living on a farm only a mile from Fort Edward, said that Handcock called at the farm during the afternoon, and did not leave until evening. The court found both men not guilty.

Lieutenant Witton related that for the next three days the prisoners heard nothing concerning the findings as yet not made known. Suddenly one morning the five officers, Lenehan, Morant, Witton, Handcock and Picton, were escorted by a guard with fixed bayonets to Pietersburg station. All except Lenehan were handcuffed.

At Pretoria station on the morning of Saturday 21 February, still handcuffed and surrounded by armed escorts, the prisoners were taken to the gaol to be locked up in some of the same quarters once occupied by the Jameson Raiders. Lenehan was immediately sent to Cape Town and shipped to Australia by the first available berth.

Until the time of the transfer to Pretoria the prisoners remained reasonably optimistic. Handcock and Morant were already acquitted of the charges relating to Hesse; the lightest possible sentence, a reprimand, had been

given Lenehan, and Taylor had been cleared outright. Now Witton, Picton, Morant and Handcock collectively awaited the findings on charges arising from the shooting of Boer prisoners on three separate occasions, to the number of 12 all told. They seem at first to have anticipated a sentence which would result in no more than being cashiered from the army. But the manner and mood surrounding the movement to Pretoria, borne out by the handcuffing and the armed guards, quickly dispelled their first hopes.

Left alone for several days in Pretoria gaol the four officers considered their likely fate. On Thursday 26 February the official silence ended when the prisoners were escorted individually to the office of the prison Governor to receive the verdict and the sentence of the Court. Morant preceded Handcock. Their sentences were the same: death by being shot. The sentences were confirmed by Kitchener. For Witton, a sentence of death commuted by Kitchener to life imprisonment. Picton was found guilty of manslaughter and dismissed from the army.

As mentioned, Witton, aided by having seen papers in the possession of Major Thomas relating to the findings, published certain details in his book concerning the case of Visser and of the eight Boers. The Court strongly recommended mercy for each of the convicted officers. For Morant the recommendation was based on grounds of great provocation due to the mutilation of the body of his close friend, Captain Hunt; for his previous good service, in particular the capture of Field-Cornet Kelly; for the position in which he found himself away from the close support of his superiors with little previous military experience; and because of his ignorance of military law and procedure. The Court held that mercy should be extended to Witton and Handcock because they considered themselves bound to obey Morant's orders; because of their lack of knowledge of military law; and in consideration of their good services in the war.

Left unaware of the departure of the prisoners from Pietersburg, Major Thomas arrived in Pretoria by the next following train. He first visited the gaol on the morning when the sentences were made known, then spent the remainder of the day trying to find Kitchener. But the Commander-in-Chief had left Pretoria and remained away for several days. Thomas was informed by Major-General Sir William Kelly that the sentences were approved in London and could not be altered.

Back in the prison Handcock and Morant spent the afternoon within earshot of the sounds of the wardens working on the making of two plain coffins. At 5 o'clock the following morning, 27 February, Witton left the prison handcuffed and accompanied by an armed guard. From the slightly rising ground at the railway station he heard at 6 o'clock the unmistakable sharp discharge from the 18-man firing squad formed of Cameron Highlanders pierce the morning air from the prison yard in the town.

On the voyage to South Africa from Australia in the *Surrey*, Harry Morant had formed a friendship with Trooper J. H. Morrow, although it was said the two had little in common other than a mutual love of horses. Morrow later joined the newly-formed Pretoria Police. When the officers of the Bushveldt Carbineers were locked up in the gaol, Morrow happened to be one of the warders on duty. So during those last days these old comrades in arms saw a lot of each other. In a letter sent to G. R. Aldridge, a former comrade of himself and Morant in the Second South Australian Contingent, Morrow described how bravely both men died:

'They were shot next morning at six o'clock and were buried at five o'clock in the evening. There were a large number of Australians at the funeral, no less than 30 of them being officers. The only reply given by the two men when asked if they were ready was: "Yes, where is your party?" And the two men marched out hand in hand. The firing party went to blindfold the men, but Morant said: "Take this thing off," and pulled the handkerchief off. As the men sat in the chairs awaiting death, Morant said: "Be sure and make a job of it." Morant folded his arms on his chest and looked them straight in the face. The firing party fired, and Morant got it all in the left side, and died at once, with his arms folded and his eyes open. You would have thought he was alive.'

The fellow countrymen of the executed officers made certain that the bodies were given a dignified burial outside the confines of the prison walls. A clergyman from a church in the town attended to read a shortened burial service. To this day Lieutenants Morant and Handcock rest in a common grave not many yards away from the military section of the cemetery.

With the passing of 70 years, of the hundreds of soldiers' graves in Pretoria cemetery only the resting place of Prince Victor, a grandson of Queen Victoria, is tended and well-kept. As for the small earthy plot within stone surrounds marked by a marble cross on which are recorded the names of Handcock and Morant, primula and other annuals bloom in season, as they do on the grave of the Royal Prince.

The news of the executions reached Australia indirectly fully a month later, accompanied by the circulation of wild stories. The Australian Government, up to this stage completely unaware either of the preliminary enquiries into the actions of the Bushveldt Carbineers or the courts-martial, now directed enquiries to General Kitchener. The following reply from the Commander-in-Chief appeared in the Australian newspapers on 7 April 1902:

'In reply to your telegram, Morant, Handcock and Witton were charged with 20 murders, including one of a German missionary, who had witnessed other murders. Twelve of these murders were proved. From the evidence it appears that Morant was the originator of the crimes, which Handcock carried out in a cold-blooded manner. The murders were committed in

the wildest parts of the Transvaal, known as Spelonken, about 80 miles to the north of Pretoria, on four separate dates, namely, 2 July, 11 August, 23 August and 7 September 1901. In one case when eight Boers were murdered, it was alleged to have been done in a spirit of revenge for the ill-treatment of one of their officers—Lieutenant Hunt—who was killed in action. No such ill-treatment was proved. The prisoners were convicted after a most exhaustive trial, and were defended by counsel. There were in my opinion, no extenuating circumstances. Lieutenant Witton was also convicted, but I commuted the sentence to penal servitude for life, in consideration of his having been under the influence of Morant and Handcock. The proceedings have been sent home.'

The most damning points about the contents of the telegram are the mis-statements of fact, and the considered statements that differ in opinion from those delivered by the Court. In the first place Handcock and Morant were not charged with 20 murders as Kitchener would have the Australian Government believe. Nor were they charged with something that took place on 2 July. Relatively unimportant but also incorrect are the references to the distance of Spelonken from Pretoria—nearer 200 miles than 80—and the misquoting of the rank of Captain Hunt. Whereas the Court accepted the evidence of the ill-treatment of Hunt's body, Kitchener on the other hand stated 'no such ill-treatment was proved'. The Court also gave a number of extenuating circumstances, which in its opinion warranted a strong recommendation for mercy. In the opinion of Kitchener 'there were no extenuating circumstances'.

It has been said that when Lord Kitchener visited Australia in 1910 he declined to unveil the war memorial at Bathurst unless the name of Lieutenant P. J. Handcock was removed. This story has never been proved but the legend certainly still persists, not only in the Bathurst district. Handcock's name was placed on the memorial on 1 March 1964 following strong representations by the local sub-branch of the Returned Services League of Australia. Major H. G. Palmer who had served in the ranks of the Second Western Australian Mounted Infantry wrote to the Bathurst RSL in January 1964 urging the placing of Handcock's name on the memorial and stating that at the time of the execution of the two men, the Australians in South Africa were on the verge of staging a demonstration, which would have been called a mutiny. Major Palmer said that the complete silence of the British War Office must be judged as 'nothing short of scandalous'.

The Bathurst City Council accepted the request of the Returned Services League to place Handcock's name on the memorial and this was done in a ceremony attended by members of his family, including his son Peter who died several years later. The brass name-plate was screwed on to the bottom of the Roll of Honour and is there to this day. A report in the *Western*

Advocate on 2 March 1964 said that the placing of Handcock's name on the memorial was 'the culmination of more than 50 years of intense agitation by members of his family and more latterly by the Bathurst Sub-Branch of the RSL'.

Major Lenehan, deported hastily out of South Africa by the military authorities following his release from arrest, was forced to leave without time for the disposal of his horses and effects. He was sent by rail to Cape Town under charge of the Provost Marshal. For seven days he was kept under arrest in the military prison, part of the time in close confinement in a cell, until the departure of the steamer *Aberdeen*.

In an explanation to the Australian Government, dated 29 January 1903, the War Office stated: 'It was considered by Lord Kitchener most undesirable, in view of Major Lenehan's connection with the events that lead not only to his trial, but to the trial and execution of other officers in the Bushveldt Carbineers, that he should remain in the Transvaal, or be continued in military employment after his release.'⁹

The opinion of the Australian Prime Minister, Mr J. C. Watson, was expressed in Parliament on 27 July 1904: 'It was most extraordinary that, after the court-martial had inflicted the lightest sentence that could possibly be passed on Major Lenehan, the authorities should subsequently take steps to deport him from the country.' The Prime Minister had also said: 'I say that that was a most unjust and un-British thing to do. It rested with the military authorities to justify their treatment of an Australian officer in that manner.'

When he arrived back in Australia, Lenehan was not permitted to rejoin his regiment; he found himself placed on the retired list. Lenehan was anxious to join the newly-formed Commonwealth Forces, but the officer commanding, Major-General Sir Edward Hutton, refused to reinstate him. For the next two years Lenehan continued to press his claims without success. He even wrote to Colonel Hall in India, asking him to confirm that he had reported verbally the shooting of the Boer prisoners. No reply was received from Colonel Hall. One of the most puzzling aspects of all the happenings in Pietersburg was the removal from the country immediately before the courts-martial began of the officer responsible for the entire area in which the events took place and to whom various reports were either made or should have been made.

Lenehan's efforts for reinstatement began to take effect when the Australian Government made a request to the War Office for a copy of the court-martial proceedings against him. Mr Watson said in Parliament that, after studying the papers, the Australian Government had sent several communications to the British War Office, asking 'whether there was

anything against Major Lenehan other than what was decided upon by the court-martial, the evidence given before which was available. The War Office took some time to reply to that question, but eventually they sent the answer that there was nothing more against Major Lenehan than had been before the court-martial.' Mr Watson added that he had been informed that quite a number of officers holding important commands in South Africa had at different times been reprimanded by the Courts of Military Inquiry and were allowed to continue in their commands.

Following these Parliamentary researches the Government declined to hold an inquiry, as had once been suggested by Major Lenehan and supported by some Members of Parliament. On 27 July 1904 Mr Watson told Parliament that 'the holding of an inquiry would imply that doubt exists in our minds, and we have no doubt'.¹ Lenehan was admitted to the Commonwealth Forces, restored to his previous rank of Major and placed in command of a battery of Field Artillery.

Transported from Pretoria to England to serve a sentence of life imprisonment, Witton remained in the Lewes military prison until 1904, while lengthy petitions compiled in both South Africa and Australia failed to bring about his release. On 10 August his imprisonment came to an end, with the announcement made in the House of Commons that the clemency of King Edward VII had been extended to annul the sentence.

The activities of the special force known as the Bushveldt Carbineers took place over less than a year, in a remote and wild part of the northern Transvaal. In most accounts of the war its activities are barely mentioned, for the corps fought no large engagements. Its job was to round up, by long patrols, small bands of dispersed Boers in the difficult country north of Pietersburg. The headquarters in the farmhouse called Fort Edward was far from the control of the regular army. It so happened that the majority of the men forming the Carbineers were Australians. Not until well after the disbandment of the corps in an atmosphere of disgrace and with the punishment of some of its members did the knowledge of its troubles become known outside South Africa.

The general opinion held at the time, and one maintained by many down through the years, was that Handcock and Morant were made to pay the extreme penalty as a form of reparation for the shooting of the German missionary, Hesse, even though this was the very charge on which they were acquitted because of the lack of evidence. It also happened to be the case about which the authorities were the most concerned. This was due to the possible effect it could have on the already troubled relations at the time between Great Britain and Germany. Hence the decision of the War Office to remain silent forever.

⁹ Correspondence with the Australian Government, 26 Feb 1903, in the Australian Archives.

¹ The above quotations have been taken from *Parliamentary Debates*, 17 June to 28 July 1904, Vol XX, pp. 3576-3596.

The press of the day reported that Mrs Hesse wrote a letter to the Berlin Missionary Society in which she claimed that her husband was followed and shot to prevent the possibility of a report of the shooting of the eight Boers reaching Pretoria. During the long period of solitary confinement Handcock confessed to the shooting of Hesse, stating that he was incited to do so by Morant. Later, with the benefit of legal advice, this statement was withdrawn and treated as having been made under the stress of mental strain. In any event there is no evidence of it ever having been used by the prosecution at the court-martial. Major Thomas was of the opinion (generally held) that because of the climatic conditions at the time, and the area, and having been acquitted in the Hesse case, the most the accused men would get would be some term of imprisonment for the other charges, which would in turn be lessened by remissions.

One day in 1929 Witton, long settled on a dairy farm in Queensland, received a letter from Major Thomas whose mind was still troubled by the memory of the trial and executions. Thomas wrote to tell Witton that he was considering writing an account of the story of the Bushveldt Carbineers. Witton's letter in reply, dated 21 October 1929, was later deposited with the Trustees of the Mitchell Library in Sydney by a member of the Thomas family, with the proviso that it was not to be opened until 1970. The letter in part, but in correct sequence and context, is quoted:

'Personally I think the attitude you take with regard to Morant and Handcock and the Hesse case is not the right one. I am inclined to think that neither of them took you into their confidence over that case. Up to the time of the Court of Inquiry when I was charged with complicity in his death I had no more knowledge of how Hesse came by his death than the babe unborn nor did I have at any time the slightest suspicion that Morant or Handcock was connected with it.

'It staggered me at the time but my statement in reply I think cleared me of that count at that inquiry. Subsequently when we were allowed to see each other Morant told me that Handcock had broken down and confessed to everything including shooting Hesse. I saw Handcock shortly afterwards and asked him about the Hesse business. He said "Why, wasn't you standing beside Morant when he asked me if I was game to follow the missionary and wipe him out?"

'I had been with them up to the time Morant returned from interviewing Hesse when he drove past the fort. I left them there and went to my tent and did not see them again until they came in to dinner about 7 o'clock. I believe Morant got Handcock to deny his previous statement in which he had made "a clean breast of everything" and they got to work to frame up an alibi which you know was successful and the means of their acquittal.

'But you must not forget, Kitchener held Handcock's "confession", in which he implicated me as an accessory, no doubt unwittingly done while

in a high strung nervous state, but that accounts for the reason why only Morant, Handcock and myself were punished and the War Office so adamant in my case. Had there been no Hesse case the shooting of prisoners would not have worried them much. But the shooting of Hesse was a premeditated and most cold blooded affair. Handcock with his own lips described it all to me. I consider I am the one and only one that suffered unjustly (apart from yourself). Morant and Handcock being acquitted, my lips were sealed.'

The contents of this letter must have come as a great shock to Thomas but there is no record of his reaction or reply. He certainly never published the proposed book on the whole affair. He lived in Tenterfield most of his life, owning a nearby farm and at one time also publishing the local newspaper as well as practising there as a solicitor before and after the Boer War. There is ample evidence that the Morant-Handcock affair became an obsession with him and that it changed his whole life. Thomas lived until he was well over 80 and died in 1945.

The letter to Thomas indicates that the passage of the years had obviously embittered Witton and this is not surprising in view of his experiences at the hands of the War Office. In *Scapegoats of the Empire* he certainly does not make any charge against Handcock; if anything he sets out to defend him. The nearest Witton went to implicating Handcock was when he wrote: 'Handcock was never the bloodthirsty desperado that (after he had been shot) he was made out to be; he was simply the tool of unprincipled men who had the power of command.'

Witton was kinder when he wrote: 'He was born and reared to bush pursuits, and was a hard worker; if he was not doctoring the back of a worn-out horse he was at the forge shoeing. He never initiated any outrage, but he had a keen sense of duty and could be absolutely relied upon to fulfil it. He had been under fire many times and there never was a braver man.'

There is little doubt that the War Office propaganda against the Bushveldt Carbineers and their alleged outrages had its effect in Australia, notably in the Press and then later in the Parliament. The new Commonwealth Government made no official protest even though Kitchener's report was most biased and at least in one major respect completely misleading. When questioned in Parliament the Prime Minister, Edmund Barton, virtually disowned the men and the Government gave the impression it was completely satisfied with Kitchener's report and believed that justice had been done. The national Press was particularly bitter in its support of the Kitchener report and the War Office. All this led to most Australians believing that Morant and Handcock, and Witton for that matter, had met their just deserts.

It was only the stand taken by Australian soldiers—officers and men alike—and their resentment at the conduct of the case which led to a change in

the thinking of the Australian people, and the passage of the years has undoubtedly softened public opinion against Morant and Handcock; the result has been that they have now become something of local folklore with greater emphasis being placed on the story of Morant's adventurous life and tragic death.

In 1962 F. M. Cutlack revived public interest when he published his book *Breaker Morant* and he was outspoken in his criticism of the shabby treatment of the accused men. Cutlack wrote that it was 60 years since protesting Australian voices had demanded in vain to know why the War Office hushed up the proceedings and even the results of the series of court-martial arising out of the completely unjust treatment of the accused men in the court of inquiry, which ran on for three months at Pietersburg late in 1901. Cutlack claimed that there had never been an answer to the charge that, in order to satisfy the demands of a powerful foreign government, Morant and Handcock were shot for a crime alleged against them of which they had been acquitted by their judges.

With Morant and Handcock in their common grave in Pretoria it is difficult to see why Witton kept silent until 1929, especially when facing a life term while in prison in England until 1904. He had been acquitted of any complicity whatsoever in the Hesse affair and was to write in *Scapegoats of the Empire*: 'It was not intended to seriously punish me, but a conviction in that case [i.e. the Hesse case] having been missed, it was necessary to include me to secure Handcock.' This is probably true but Witton made no reference to the alleged remarks of Handcock to him, quoted in his 1929 letter to Thomas, either in *Scapegoats of the Empire* or, apparently, anywhere else until 1929.

His bitter state of mind by then is revealed in the following paragraph from the same letter: 'I took no part in the later War when asked to volunteer. I said yes, I'm Fisher's last man. He pledged Australia to the last man and the last shilling.' Witton's bitterness is understandable but it does not make him a very reliable witness against the unfortunate Handcock, 27 years after the event. He died in 1942.

Morant and Handcock are better remembered by most people interested in the case by the tribute paid to them by Thomas in a letter written in obvious anguish on 27 February 1902, immediately after they had been shot by the firing party. Thomas wrote of his desperate last-minute pleas for mercy:

'I begged especially for Handcock who was merely present as a veterinary lieutenant when Morant ordered the Boers to be shot for outrages. I pleaded his want of education and of military knowledge and all that I could plead, but in vain. Poor Handcock was right when he wrote: "Our graves were dug before we left the Spelonken." They were dug; I see it all clearly now and why. I know what I cannot write in this accursed, military-ridden

country. Poor Handcock! A brave, true, simple man! And Morant, brave but hot-headed! They took their sentences with marvellous braveness, their pluck astonished all . . . Poor brave fellows! Nothing will worry them again in this world, and if there be another world God will not think worse of them than we do, surely. May they rest in peace.'

A letter written by Handcock to his sister some hours before he was shot reveals that he died believing that whatever he had done was in the performance of what he regarded as his duty. Handcock had enlisted in the First New South Wales Mounted Rifles as a shoeing-smith and was promoted to the rank of farrier-sergeant before he left this unit. He received his commission when he joined the Bushveldt Carbineers after his own regiment had returned to Australia in May 1901. His farewell letter to his sister is now in the possession of the Australian War Memorial and is reproduced opposite page 000.

Mr Arthur Lynch, born at Smythesdale, near Ballarat, in 1861 and a graduate of Melbourne University, was another Australian whose activities in South Africa brought him a commuted death sentence from a British court-martial. A qualified engineer whose father came from Ireland to Ballarat during the gold-rush days, Lynch went to England and established himself as a journalist. In that capacity he went to West Africa during the Ashanti campaign in 1896.

Soon after the beginning of the Boer War he sailed in a German ship bound for the Transvaal as a correspondent for certain Paris, New York and London publications. The *Hertzog* was held up by a British warship outside Durban, but was allowed to proceed to Lourenco Marques after investigation which also involved the questioning of Lynch regarding his intentions.

When Lynch first met General Botha in Johannesburg he learned that his plan to work as a correspondent for European and American newspapers behind the Boer lines would not be practicable. With all his sympathies on the side of the Republics he therefore forsook all thoughts of journalism and offered his services to the Boer forces. Although an Irish brigade under Colonel Blake had already taken the field, Lynch suggested to Botha that a second Irish brigade be formed. Botha sent Lynch to Pretoria with an introduction to Kruger. The President willingly approved of the proposition, and placed Lynch in command with the rank of Colonel. Of President Kruger Lynch wrote: 'It was he who supplied in the highest degree the sense of morale to the Boers. Often he pretended he could not speak English.'

In this way, within a few weeks of his arrival in the Transvaal and without the benefit of military experience, Colonel Lynch advanced into Natal early in 1900 at the head of the Second Irish Brigade. The brigade was officered by a high percentage of Germans and Frenchmen. Lynch met General

Joubert near Ladysmith. He described the General as looking 'like an old farmer who had come to market to sell pigs'.

The situation on the Ladysmith front soon became critical for the Boers. The Second Irish Brigade became attached to the rearguard engaged in delaying the British advance, following the breakthrough across the Tugela River. Lynch and his men fought under Louis Botha against Buller at Waschbank, and at Helpmakaar under Christiaan Botha. They assisted in delaying the British advance across Laing's Nek, once being continuously in the saddle for three days and nights.

From Laing's Nek the brigade swung across to Vereeniging, as Roberts and his army advanced towards the Vaal. At Vereeniging the Irish Brigade was opposed to the Second Victorian Mounted Rifles at the bridgehead. They eventually retreated over the bridge and then blew it up. Colonel Lynch took part in a war council held by Botha at Meyerton before the withdrawal to Klipriviersberg, on the southern outskirts of Johannesburg. The brigade was present at the skirmishing engagement that pushed back the Australian scouts advancing across the Klip River towards Baragwanath just prior to the fall of Johannesburg. Among the last of the Boer forces to retreat from Johannesburg, the brigade continued in the resistance right up to the fall of Pretoria. By that time a large part of the force had dwindled away so, after six months in the field, the Second Irish Brigade disbanded.

Arthur Lynch continued to assist the Boer cause by campaigning in the United States, before settling down in Paris. From Paris, in 1901, he stood for the second time for the constituency of Galway in Ireland after having once been unsuccessful in the pre-Boer War years. As the sympathies of most people in Ireland were with the Boers, his role in the war stood him in good stead and he was elected. But Lynch could not take up his seat in the House of Commons because of a warrant out for his arrest. Meanwhile he continued to live in Paris.

When the war came to an end, Lynch thought the time seemed opportune to make a bid to return to England. He publicised his intention by sending a letter to the *London Times*. On 11 June 1902 Lynch was arrested at Dover on a charge of treason. In January 1903, the former Colonel Lynch was found guilty of taking up arms against his country and of ordering those serving under him to fire on British soldiers. The prosecution brought to London a Natal farmer, Mr Lewis Handley. He gave evidence against Lynch, who quartered troops on Handley's farm for 10 days in March 1900, confiscating his cattle and destroying 100 acres of crops.

The sentence of death for high treason imposed on Lynch was commuted to one of life imprisonment. After serving one year of the sentence, Lynch was released in 1904. Once more he was elected to represent an Irish constituency. This time he took up his seat in the House of Commons at Westminster as the member for West Clare.

When war broke out in 1914 Lynch offered his services in whatever capacity he might prove most useful. As a result he was given the assignment to raise men in Ireland to serve in France. He addressed recruiting meetings throughout the country in a campaign that proved generally so unsuccessful that at times he barely escaped with his life. The unpopularity so earned cost him his seat in the Commons at the 1918 elections and he died in London in 1934.



CHAPTER 23

Peace

On the war front Kitchener continued to apply pressure in the opening months of 1902. The enemy found themselves confronted with more drives operated in conjunction with the blockhouse lines. By concentrating on single sections of the country in a gradually increasing scale, Kitchener made the role of the guerilla forces increasingly difficult. In the western Transvaal where the blockhouse lines were the most incomplete, British supply convoys were drawn of necessity across open veldt away from close blockhouse support.

Considering the size of the zone under his command General Methuen was not over garrisoned with troops in the west, a situation due in part to the presence of guerilla forces in the Cape Colony. Despite the efforts of General French with 9,000 men, small commandos totalling about one-third of his force in number but well organised by General Smuts, succeeded in keeping his troops engaged at a time when Kitchener needed them elsewhere.

Just before dawn on 25 February De la Rey, the 'Lion of the West', decisively ambushed a convoy going to Klerksdorp for supplies. De la Rey achieved surprise by hiding 1,200 burghers in thick bush by the side of the

road. A quarter of the British escort of 700 men were either killed or wounded. De la Rey took more than 500 prisoners. More importantly he got tens of thousands of rounds of ammunition. Without the means to hold the prisoners he released them all the next day, allowing them to walk back to the nearest camp.

When Methuen received a report of the defeat of the convoy he determined to tackle De la Rey who was then trekking north. Hastily collecting a mixed column of 1,300 men, Methuen set out from Vryburg on the western railway with a large convoy of wagons to march through 90 miles of dry country to a point south of Lichtenburg where he expected to link up with a mounted column proceeding from Klerksdorp. Shortly after dawn on 7 March the convoy was still 25 miles away from joining the Klerksdorp column. The day's march had hardly commenced when De la Rey attacked near Tweebosch.

Methodically the burghers proceeded to overwhelm the convoy and escort. Methuen fell wounded. Two hundred infantrymen from the Northumberland Fusiliers were isolated in a depression in the veldt and held out for three hours until their ammunition ran low. They surrendered at 9.30 a.m. One party held out in a kraal until two guns and a pom-pom were trained on them. They surrendered at 10 a.m.

Methuen's horse had been killed and his wound was serious, with his thigh fractured by a bullet. De la Rey and Methuen met in a tent, a dramatic first meeting for the two generals who had first opposed one another in the field more than two years earlier. The Boer general chivalrously released the British general so that he could be moved to a hospital for the treatment of his wound.

Soon after the Federation of the Australian colonies the Commonwealth Government, which now alone had the power to raise forces or to send troops overseas, took over the military establishments of the States so that they became from then on, Federally controlled commands.

On 21 December 1901 Mr Joseph Chamberlain cabled the Australian Prime Minister, asking for 1,000 Commonwealth mounted troops. Mr Barton replied that he would be glad to provide the men, adding that Australia would have been prepared to send more. On 14 January 1902 the Australian Parliament pledged Australia to give the Mother Country all the necessary support to bring the war to an end.

Over the next three months the Australian commitment progressively increased, so that by the end of March the troops about to go overseas had increased to 4,000. These volunteers responded just as eagerly as in the early days of the war. In Victoria in January, when only 250 men were required from that State, no less than 2,200 had enrolled by the end of the month.

The raising of the Australian Commonwealth Horse, comprising eight battalions, took place quickly, after the same tests in shooting and horsemanship as had been applied for the earlier contingents. By the end of March the first battalions were disembarking at Durban. At the request of General Kitchener the Commonwealth also sent an Australian Medical Corps with a complete Field Hospital under Colonel Williams, who had earlier served with the New South Wales Army Medical Corps.

From Durban the Commonwealth Horse moved up by train via Ladysmith, Elandslaagte and Dundee to Newcastle in the north of Natal. By 22 March 1,000 Australians were camped alongside 1,000 New Zealanders, not far from Mount Majuba. In Natal the only active duties of the Commonwealth Horse consisted of holding the Drakensberg passes at the time of the great eastern drive that almost caught de Wet.

When Kitchener heard of the disasters that had overtaken Methuen's convoys, he reacted by organising a drive in the far western Transvaal against De la Rey's commandos. To take part in this drive the Australians and New Zealanders entrained early in April for Klerksdorp travelling by way of Volksrust, Standerton and Potchefstroom. In a train collision near Frederikstad 14 New Zealanders were killed.

On the morning of 11 April 1902 Colonel Sir Henry Rawlinson and Colonel Kekewich with forces forming part of a semi-circular drive by General Sir Ian Hamilton were positioned at Roodeval farm on the Brak Spruit, 3 miles from the Hart River in western Transvaal. At 7.15 a.m. a commando 800 strong attacked from the south. Riding into full view over a slight rise the charging Boers came over an open field of fire to within 300 yards of the British line, where they faltered and broke before pom-poms and the mostly high fire from 1,500 rifles.

The Commandant, F. J. Potgieter, was killed in front of the British lines. The total Boer losses were 50 killed and 30 wounded. In a pursuit of over 18 miles two field guns and a pom-pom were taken and 30 burghers captured.

In his despatches dated 1 June 1902 Kitchener mentioned two National Scouts: 'General Andries Cronje, in pursuit of enemy's guns at Roodeval on 11 April 1902, outstripped his men, and captured them single handed. He afterwards pursued and captured three men single-handed.' Kitchener also mentioned Commandant Pickard 'for good service'.

At Klerksdorp the Commonwealth Horse with the Bushmen and the New Zealanders formed part of an army of 20,000 men under the command of General Sir Ian Hamilton. On 21 April the Commonwealth Horse moving out of camp turned away from the Klerksdorp-Ventersdorp block-house line towards the western railway. Their orders were to destroy crops and mealie fields wherever they found them and wherever the enemy was met to push him back towards the railway barrier along which six armoured cars patrolled continuously.

The drive greatly diminished the Boer supplies in the area, thousands of cattle and mules and nearly 200 wagons and 7,000 rounds of ammunition being seized. Only 367 prisoners were taken. In despatches dated 2 June 1902 Kitchener said: 'Most of the prisoners fell into the hands of Lieut-Colonel De Lisle who, with the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the Commonwealth Horse Regiment, formed part of Thorneycroft's column.'

For four successive days of the drive the Australians and New Zealanders advanced, riding over dry and open country and fanning out and entrenching along a six-mile front. Kitchener in his despatches drew special attention to the spade work done by the Commonwealth Regiments, the Third New South Wales Bushmen and Eighth New Zealand Contingent. Every night while the sweep was in progress these troops dug redoubts, to hold 20 men each, separated by 100 yards, along their front of 6 miles. The redoubts were so solidly constructed that they would have afforded perfect cover from artillery fire. The intervals between the redoubts were closed by wagons linked together with barbed wire.

At the end of the drive the Australians marked time, camping along the Ventersdorp-Klerksdorp blockhouse line and sending out patrols. The drive to the western railway proved to be the last one of the war.

The success of the blockhouse lines coupled with the prospect of the system becoming even more intensified, the near approach of the third winter of the war and the shortages of food and clothing induced the Boer leaders to meet and discuss the possibility of opening peace negotiations. They were already aware that the British Government favoured direct talks between the Boer leaders and General Kitchener. From Botha's headquarters somewhere beyond Standerton emissaries were sent to the British lines under a flag of truce.

Under a safe conduct granted by Kitchener the Acting President, Schalk Burger and others travelled by train from Middelburg to Kroonstad. Kitchener then agreed to allow the train to continue to Klerksdorp so that the Transvaal and Free State leaders could meet to compare and assess the overall military situation of the Republican forces. From these meetings it was hoped the necessity for some basis for peace proposals would be realised.

In Klerksdorp, at the time General Hamilton was making his preparations for the great drive, Schalk Burger and the Free State President Steyn, Louis Botha, De la Rey and de Wet conferred in a British tent. As a result of the discussions, they met Kitchener and Lord Milner at Pretoria to place before them proposals based on the retention of the independence of the Republics. The British Government however quickly rejected the notion that the Republics be allowed to retain any form of independence.

The Boer leaders in turn replied that as they had no warrant to surrender the independence of their countries they must first consult the burghers in the field. To enable this to be done the leaders were granted every facility

by Kitchener and Milner to visit and address the widely dispersed commandos and to elect delegates to attend a general conference. Deney's Reitz, who accompanied General Smuts on the long 600 miles journey from the north-west of the Cape Colony to attend the Assembly of Delegates, trekked with Smuts beyond Standerton to visit Botha. He described the appearance of the burghers in these words: 'Nothing could have proved more clearly how nearly the Boer cause was spent, than these starving ragged men, clad in skins or sacking, their bodies covered with sores from lack of salt or food.'

On 15 May 60 delegates from the commandos of both States assembled with their leaders at Vereeniging on the banks of the river Vaal. For three days the Assembly listened to reports from the district delegates made with the full knowledge of the insistence by the British of a settlement without independence.

Botha said that in the Transvaal nearly 11,000 burghers remained in the field, but almost 4,000 of these were without horses. He listed the three greatest difficulties as the scarcity of food, the worn out and exhausted condition of the horses, and the welfare of the women and children. In certain districts no grain remained, in others enough only for a month or two. Some areas were a little better off, but the blockhouse lines made it impossible to take supplies from one district to another. In the words of Botha: 'We can pass the blockhouses by night indeed, but never by day. They are likely to prove the ruin of our commandos.'

Nothing weighed more heavily on the minds of the Assembly than the plight of the women and children still attached to the commandos in the field. Their privations were such that some families had lost up to four children. 'Some of our women', declared de la Rey, 'have nothing but clothes made of skins to wear.' Landdrost Bosman of Wakkerstroom reported: 'The men in my district told me that if I came back and reported that the war was to be continued they would be obliged—for the sake of their wives and children—to go straight to the English camp and lay down their arms.' Mr J. De Clercq reported from Middelburg that the women had wished to go on foot to the English, but he had advised them to wait until the results of the present negotiations should become known.¹

Trooper Ronald McInnis described the condition of the women and children taken with a convoy near Klerksdorp: 'I have never seen women and children in such a terrible plight as those we got in this convoy. Very few of them had shoes or stockings, and the children were crying bitterly of the cold. One little girl had as her only garment a towel sewn into the shape of a bag, with two holes for her arms. In the matter of food too their condition was pitiful, and were it not for mealies they must have starved to death long ago.'

¹ This and other quotations above taken from C. R. de Wet, *Three Years War*.

Private Frank Darby, New South Wales Army Medical Corps, wrote: 'Words could not describe the condition of the country. Stark starvation was rampant in all directions, principally amongst the wives and children of the Boers who are still fighting. I visited a farmhouse in which were living three women and 10 children. They were all in a wretched state. They had been existing for some time on mealie meal, and their supply had been reduced to one sack which was on the cob. The British were, however, collecting all the women and children from the farms and sending them to towns, where they received full supply of rations.'

In 1903 Mrs De la Rey wrote: 'We had all sorts of difficulties. The poor burghers were very badly off for clothes. They began tanning skins and using them. We got quite clever at dressing the skins, and they were soft and clean. If a man had a pair of trousers almost worn out, he would patch them up with "armoured clothers". The women and children took blankets and made skirts and jackets out of them. I cannot say who it was who were wrong, we or our adversaries, but this I can say, it was terrible to bear.'²

While many of the women no doubt welcomed the opportunity to enter the camps others had become imbued with an intense bitterness for all things English. On 21 July 1901, while taking part in the capture of a small convoy near Klerksdorp, Regimental Sergeant-Major James McGillivray, a South Australian, went after some Cape carts forming part of the convoy. As he galloped up McGillivray was shot dead by a woman firing from one of the carts.

From the end of 1901 Kitchener refused to take into the camps any more of the nomadic women and children following the commandos. On 1 December he also wrote to Schalk Burger, in reply to protests about the camps, offering to send all the women and children to the care of the commandos. He arranged for copies to reach Steyn and de Wet. 'Everything has been done,' he wrote, 'which the conditions of a state of war allowed to provide for the well-being of the women and children; but as you complain of that treatment and must, therefore, be in a position to provide for them, I have the honour to inform you that all women and children at present in our camps, who are willing to leave will be sent to your care, and I shall be happy to be informed where you desire that they should be handed over to you.'³

The delegate for Vrijheid, Mr Birkenstock, reported to the Assembly: 'The presence of women and children causes great difficulty, for of late the English have refused to receive the families which, compelled by famine, wished to take refuge with them.' General Smuts said that there was no chance of a rising by the Boers in the Cape Colony. 'Our country,' he

said, 'is already devastated and in ruins, let us stop before our people are ruined also.'

In the concentration camps 20,000 women and children had died of disease. In the face of these appalling figures, the outlook facing the Boer Republics in May 1902 was such that Botha felt compelled to address the Assembly in terms even more direct than the speakers already quoted.

'When the war began,' he said, 'we had plenty of provisions and a commando could remain for weeks in one spot without the local food supply running out. Our families, too, were then well provided for. But all this is now changed. One is only too thankful nowadays to know that our wives are under English protection.'⁴

The children made up easily the highest proportion of the camp population. Among the adults women and old people predominated, the fit burghers being well in the minority. Set up in haste to take a large influx of people, the camps in the beginning were administered by the Army but soon came under a civil authority. Some of the camps were badly situated on land that became swampy after rain. In other instances the water supply was unsatisfactory. Sometimes the medical services proved inadequate.

The highest proportion of deaths occurred when the people first began to come in from the veldt, after being continuously on the move with the commandos to escape the British columns. Many of the women and children were in rags, and without boots. Some were in such a destitute and run down condition that they fell easy victims to diseases, some of which were introduced by newcomers. An epidemic of measles caused the highest death rate among the children. Malaria, whooping cough and enteric fever were other maladies.

The Superintendent of the Brandfort camp reported: 'Among the refugees brought in by Major-General E. Elliot's column, a great number were in a deplorable state. Most of them had been taken from a laager in the district of Hoopstad, and had been with the commandos for several months. The privations and hardships had told with great effect on the health of the women and children, many of whom were most scantily clad. In some instances women had clothed their children with sheep-skins and roughly dressed hides, and the people almost without exception expressed their pleasure at having been taken away from the commandos.'

The authorities found that when they were unable to get all the children into the hospitals, many of the Boer mothers ignored the advice of the doctors and nurses. There was a tendency to conceal illnesses, and often an objection to sending children to hospital. A report found that 'the Boer remedy for measles apparently is a tea made of goat's dung. This is administered by the mother with deplorable results. Another favourite remedy

² Mrs De la Rey, *A Woman's Wanderings and Trials during the Anglo-Boer War* (1903).

³ B. J. Viljoen, *My Reminiscences of the Anglo-Boer War*, Appendix.

⁴ *Three Years War*, Appendix 'C'.

appears to be an absolute refusal to wash the children, or any attempt at cleanliness.'

In the matter of camp hygiene some of the Boer women found difficulty in conforming to the rules and regulations necessary in close communities. On 9 November 1901 Dr Pratt Yule, medical officer of the Orange River Colony, reported to the Public Health Department at Bloemfontein: 'The great majority of the people are filthy in their habits, though probably they are not to blame for this under ordinary circumstances. They live apart, there are no sanitary conveniences of any kind (on the majority of farms latrines are unknown) and every kind of refuse and slops is disposed of in the vicinity of their houses. They have naturally introduced their habits into the camps. When the camps were first formed it was extremely difficult to get the refugees to use latrines. They were unaccustomed to them, and preferred the open spaces around their tents. The camps had to be strictly policed to prevent this. Though slopwater receptacles were provided, urine and slops were disposed of around the tent doors, and this continues to be the practice whenever it is possible without being caught.'

'The Dutch have a rooted objection to sending their people to hospital, though it must be patent that the conditions of hospital life are immeasurably superior to those of the tents. They do all they can to conceal diseases among the children and relatives. This has proved a fatal policy, as it has been the means of spreading measles and other infections among their families, as the cubic space of the tent is infinitely small. Every camp has its orderlies for the discovery of concealed diseases. In some cases the coffee and tea rations were reduced when tents were found to be improperly kept clean. Invariably the tents became kept beyond reproach.'

In the course of time, hospital accommodation increased. Some camps were moved to new sites, management and hygiene improved. Camp schools were built. A shortage of teachers, doctors and nurses was met by bringing staff out from Britain. In May 1902 the total population of the camps stood at 116,572.

It soon became evident from the nature of the reports delivered at the Assembly that the position of the people and the armed forces of the Boers in the Republics was nothing less than desperate. Yet there were those who wanted to carry on with the unequal struggle. Finally a select committee, headed by Botha, de Wet and Smuts, arrived in Pretoria on 19 May to place certain proposals before Kitchener and Milner. These were to the effect that in return for internal independence the Republics would be willing to forfeit the Witwatersrand and forego all foreign connections. This the British did not even consider.

⁵ *Reports Presented to Parliament by Command of His Majesty Between 1901 and 1902 on the Refugee Camps and Concentration Camps in South Africa.* (Library of New South Wales number Q968.)

The Committee left Pretoria with the final offer from the British Government to place before the Assembly at Vereeniging. Milner and Kitchener had nominated midnight on 31 May 1902 as the deadline for agreement. The British proposals were on similar lines to those submitted at Middelburg a year earlier. The Boers were to surrender their independence by acknowledging the lawful sovereignty of King Edward VII. The burghers in the field were to hand over their arms, and the British Government would spend £3,000,000 on the rebuilding of farms and the countryside. As British subjects the Boers would be granted self-government at some early date.

The Assembly discussed the proposals on 29 and 30 May but by the morning of the 31st a decision had still not been reached. Each delegate had expressed concern for the women and children not then in the concentration camps. General de Wet, the chief advocate of the 'No Surrender' party, said: 'I am asked what I mean to do with the women and children. That is a very difficult question to answer. We must have faith. I think also that we might meet the emergency in this way—a part of the men should be told off to lay down their arms for the sake of the women, and then they could take the women with them to the English in the towns.' General de Wet also said that the duty of the burghers lay in fighting on.

General Smuts reminded the Assembly that a year ago President Kruger had urged them to fight on until all means were exhausted; that time had now arrived. 'We have given President Kruger's advice a fair trial. For twelve months we have been testing the value of the methods which he urged upon us.'

After further discussions during 31 May the Boer leaders finally resigned themselves to signing the Treaty of Peace. This they did at 11 p.m. on 31 May 1902, at Pretoria, completely surrendering their independence because they feared that a decision to continue the war must endanger the future of the race. By 16 June 20,000 burghers throughout the land had laid down their arms.

The number of British soldiers killed in action, or who died of wounds in South Africa, totalled 7,792 officers and men. Another 100 men died in prisoner of war camps. A further 800 sustained accidental deaths. By far the greatest number of men died from disease, which accounted for 13,000 soldiers. Altogether the British losses amounted to nearly 22,000 men.

The British Army kept records but no precise statistics exist for the highly irregular and loosely raised commandos, whose losses are difficult to determine. The number of burghers whose deaths resulted from battle action is generally estimated at almost 6,000. When the war ended about 24,000

⁶ *Three Years War.*

Boers were held in prisoner of war camps overseas; in Bermuda, Ceylon, St Helena and India. A further 7,000 were held captive in South Africa.

In 1906 the Transvaal Colony was granted responsible Government. In the following year, with the granting of self-government, the Orange River Colony became known once again as the Orange Free State. On 31 May 1910 the Parliaments of the former Boer Republics and those of the British colonies of Cape Colony and Natal agreed on a constitution for a Union of South Africa.

In 1914, despite an armed revolt by those who saw in the European war an opportunity to break away from their British citizenship, the Union of South Africa took a place alongside Great Britain in the war with Germany. At the end of the war when the terms for the German surrender were being drawn up by the Allies at Versailles, the South African representatives—the Prime Minister Louis Botha and General Smuts—made a plea for moderation towards the defeated Germans. With Lord Milner at his side, Louis Botha, the former Commandant-General of the Boer Forces and the victor at Colenso and Spion Kop, told the conference:

'Seventeen years ago my friend and I made peace at Vereeniging—it was a bitter peace for us, bitter hard. We lost all for which we had fought—our independence, our flag, our country. But we turned our thoughts and efforts then to saving our people, and they the victors helped us. It was a hard peace for us to accept, but as I know it now, when time has shown us the truth, it was not unjust—it was a generous peace that the British people made with us, and that is why we stand with them today, side by side in the cause which has brought us all together.'⁷

⁷ C. Headlam (ed.), *The Milner Papers*, Vol 2, p. 364.

Bibliography

- AMERY, L. (ed), *The Times History of the War in South Africa, 1899-1902*. London, 1903.
- BADEN POWELL, Major B. F. S., *War in Practice: Tactical lessons on the campaign in South Africa, 1899-1902*. Isbister, London, 1903.
- BIRDWOOD, Field Marshal Lord, *Khaki and Gown*. Ward Lock & Co, London, 1941.
- BURLEIGH, Bennet, *The Natal Campaign*. Chapman & Hall, London, 1900.
- COLVILLE, Sir Henry, *The Work of the Ninth Division in South Africa in 1900*. Edward Arnold, London, 1901.
- CRESWICKE, Louis, *South Africa and the Transvaal War*. T. C. and E. Jack, Edinburgh, 1900.
- CROWE, George, *The Commission of HMS Terrible, 1899-1902*. George Newnes, London, 1903.
- CUNLIFFE, Sir Foster, *History of the Boer War* (2 vols). Methuen, London, 1901.
- DANES, R., *Cassell's Illustrated History of the Boer War, 1899-1902*. Cassell, London, 1903.
- DAVIES, W. Karri, Diary in mss in the Afrikana Library, Johannesburg.
- DEFENCE DEPARTMENT (P. L. Murray), *Official Records of the Australian Military Contingents to the War in South Africa*. Government Printer, Melbourne, 1911.
- DE LA REY, Jacoba E., *A woman's wanderings and trials during the Anglo-Boer War* (trans. by Lucy Hotz). T. Fisher Unwin, London, 1903.
- DE WET, Christiaan, *Three Years War: October 1899-1902* (trans. from the Dutch). Constable, Westminster, 1902.
- ELLIS, E. S., (and RIDPATH, J. C.), *The Story of South Africa*. Oceanic Publishing Co, Sydney, 1899.
- FREMANTLE, Sir Francis, *Impressions of a doctor in khaki*. S. Murray, London, 1901.
- GARVIN, James L., *The life of Joseph Chamberlain* (Vol III). MacMillan, London, 1934.
- GREEN, Reverend James, *Story of the Australian Bushmen: being notes of a chaplain*. W. Brooks, Sydney and Brisbane, 1903.

- HALES, Alfred G., *Campaign pictures of the war in South Africa, 1899-1900: Letters from the front*. Cassell, London, 1900.
- HALL, Colonel Sir John, *The Coldstream Guards, 1885-1914*. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1929.
- HAMILTON, General Sir Ian, *Listening for the Drums*. Faber & Faber, London, 1944.
- HARINGTON, General Sir Charles, *Plumer of Messines*. Murray, London, 1935.
- HEADLAM, Cecil (ed), *The Milner Papers—South Africa, 1897-1899*. Cassell, London, 1931.
- HEADLAM, Cecil (ed), *The Milner Papers—South Africa, 1899-1905*. Cassell, London, 1933.
- HIPPISLEY, Richard L., *History of the telegraph operations during the war in South Africa, 1899-1902*. HMSO, London, 1903.
- HMSO, Great Britain and Imperial War Office. *Correspondence between the Transvaal Republic and native tribes, 1877*.
- HMSO, Great Britain and Imperial War Office. *Correspondence relating to the surrender of the Boers in the field*.
- HMSO, Great Britain and Imperial Commissions. *Report on the care of the sick and wounded during the South African Campaign, 1901*.
- HMSO, Great Britain and Imperial War Office. *Correspondence relating to the prolongation of hostilities in South Africa, 1901*.
- HMSO, Great Britain and Imperial War Office. *Correspondence relating to negotiations between Commandant Louis Botha and Lord Kitchener, 1901*.
- HMSO, Great Britain and Imperial Administration. *Copies of Despatches in regard to the Naval Brigade in South Africa, 1901*.
- HMSO, Great Britain and Imperial War Office. *South African Despatches, February 1900, June 1902, by Lord Roberts and General Kitchener and others*.
- HMSO, Great Britain and Imperial War Office. *Correspondence relating to the recent political situations in South Africa in 1898 (August 1900)*.
- HMSO, Great Britain and Imperial Colonial Office. *Correspondence relating to the despatch of Colonial military contingents to South Africa, 1899*.
- Johannesburg Critic, The*, 1896. In the Afrikana Library, Johannesburg.
- KRUGER, S. J. P., *The Memoirs of Paul Kruger*. London, 1902.
- LEWIS, R. C., *On the Veldt*, 1902.
- Life Magazine*. "The story of Elands River", Sept-Oct 1907.
- LIVINGSTONE, David, *Missionary travels and researches in South Africa*. Murray, London, 1857.
- LIVINGSTONE, David (ed I. Schapera), *Family Letters, 1841-1856 (2 vols)*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1959.
- LOWNDES, E. P., *With the Guards Brigade from Bloemfontein to Koomati Poort and back*. Marshall, London, 1902.
- LYNCH, Arthur, *My Life Story. A chapter on joining the Boers*. John Long, London, 1924.
- MAINWARING, Arthur (and ROMER, Sir Cecil), *Second Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers in the South African War*. A. L. Humphreys, London, 1908.
- MARAIS, Johannes, *The Fall of Kruger's Republic*. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1961.
- MARCHANT, A., *The Naval Brigade in the South African War, 1899-1902*.

- MURRAY, P. L., *Official Records of the Australian Military Contingents to the War in South Africa*. Dept of Defence, Melbourne, 1911.
- OPPENHEIM, L., "Thornycroft's Mounted Infantry on Spion Kop", *Nineteenth Century*, Jan 1901.
- PHILLIPPS, Lisle March, *With Rimington in the Boer War*. Edward Arnold, London, 1901.
- RALPH, Julian, *At Pretoria: The capture of the Boer capitals and the hoisting of the flag at Pretoria*. C. A. Pearson, London, 1901.
- RALPH, Julian, *Towards Pretoria: A record of the war between Boer and Briton to the hoisting of the British flag at Bloemfontein*. C. A. Pearson, London, 1901.
- REITZ, Deneys, *Commando. A Boer journal of the Boer War*. Faber & Faber, London, 1929.
- REPPINGTON, Charles A. C., *Vestigia*. Constable, London, 1919.
- RIDPATH, J. C. (and ELLIS, E. S.), *The Story of South Africa*. Oceanic Publishing Co, Sydney, 1899.
- ROMER, Sir Cecil (and MAINWARING, Arthur), *Second Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers in the South African War*. A. L. Humphreys, London, 1908.
- SCHIKKERLING, *Commando—A Boer's Diary*. Keartland, Johannesburg, 1964.
- STIRLING, John, *The Colonials in South Africa, 1899-1902: their record based on the despatches*. Blackwood, London, 1907.
- TREVES, Sir Frederick, *The tale of a field hospital following the Ladysmith relief column in the South African War*. Cassell, London, 1900.
- VALENTINE, H., *Ten Weeks a Prisoner of War*.
- VILJOEN, Ben, *My Reminiscences of the Anglo-Boer War*. London, 1902.
- WALLACE, (Richard Horatio) Edgar, *Unofficial Despatches*. Hutchinson, London, 1901.
- WATSON, Major A., *Memoranda of the South African War. Address to the Australian Medical Congress, 1908*.
- WAUCHOPE, Sir Alexander (Grenfell), *A Short History of the Black Watch 1725-1907. To which is added an account of the 2nd Battalion in the South African War, 1899-1902*. Blackwood, London, 1908.
- WILKINSON, Frank, *Australian at the Front: a colonial view of the Boer War*. John Long, London, 1901.
- WILKINSON, Frank, *Australian Cavalry*. London, 1901.
- YARDLEY, John W., *With the Inniskilling Dragoons, 1899-1902. The record of a cavalry regiment during the Boer War*. Longmans, London, 1904.
- Other sources:
The writings of the war correspondent 'Banjo' Paterson published in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and soldiers' letters in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney); the *Age* and *Argus* (Melbourne); the *Courier* (Brisbane); and the *Advertiser* (Adelaide) published between the years 1899-1902.

Glossary

Berg	mountain
Biltong	strips of sundried meat
Boer	farmer; during the Boer war implied anyone who fought against the British
Burg	town
Burgher	a man of one of the Boer Republics with full citizen rights
Bushveldt	plain covered with bush or scrub
Commandant	senior officer of a Boer commando
Commando	irregular unit of mounted Boers
Donga	dry bed of a river or creek, or an eroded gully
Dorp	village or small township
Drift	ford
Field-Cornet	Boer lieutenant
Fontein	spring
Kloof	ravine or valley
Kopje	small hill
Kraal	native settlement enclosed by a fence; an enclosure for cattle or sheep
Laager	Boer camp — the vehicles were usually lashed together in a circle to form a protective barricade
Laagte	a hollow in the veldt
Landdrost	Boer magistrate and revenue collector
Mauser	German rifle used by the Boers
Mcalie	maize on the cob
Nek	saddle or junction point joining two hills
Pom-pom	one-pounder automatic Maxim gun, with 25 shells on a belt
Poort	pass through a mountain range
Rand	ridge
Rand, The	district round Johannesburg; short name for the Witwatersrand
Rivier	Dutch for 'river'

GLOSSARY

Rooinek	derogatory expression for European settlers; applied also to British soldiers
Sangar	low stone breastwork or rifle pit for several men
Sjambok	rhinoceros-hide whip
Spruit	rivulet or watercourse
Stad	town
Uitlander	foreigner; British settler in the Boer Republics
Veldt	open country bearing grass, bushes or shrubs or thinly forested
Vlei	hollow in which water collects in the rainy season
Volksraad	people's council or parliament
ZARP	Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek Politie (South African Republic Police)

Index

- Abbott, Tpr A. B., 281
 Abbott, Cpl J. H. M., 141
Aberdeen, troopship, 35-6, 376
 Aberline, A. M., 311
 Aberline, Tpr A. Mc., 313-14
 Abrahams, Tpr W. J., 139
 Abrahams' Kraal, 139
 Ackland, Tpr, 166
 A'Court, Col C., 151-2, 155
 Acton Homes, 145-6
 Adams, B., 247
 Adams, Mrs B., 247
 Adie, Tpr P., 96
 Afrikaner, The, 8
Age (Melbourne), 108
 Airey, Sgt F. C., 193
 Airey, Sgt H. G., 251
 Airey, Lt-Col H. P., 235, 239, 250-1, 253-4, 294
 Aitcheson, Tpr G. W., 269
 Albany, 36
 Albrecht, Tpr H., I'C, 50, 56
 Alderson, Col E. A. H., 85
 Aldridge, L.-Cpl G. R., 374
 Alexandria, 122
 Alford, Cpl J., 306
 Alice, Mount, 144, 153-5, 157, 163
 Allenby, Maj. E. H. H., 194
 Allison, Cpl T., 251
 Aloe Knoll, 152-4
 Ambulance wagons, 33, 134
 Anderson, Nursing Sister J., 249
 Angel, Tpr T. H., 318
 Annat, Lt J. W., 265-6
 Antill, Maj. E. A., 356
 Antill, Capt. J. M., 64, 85-6, 118, 133, 139, 209
 Artillery, 28, 131-2
 Artlett, Tpr H. A., 104-5
 Arundel, 101, 102, 113-14
Arundel Castle, troopship, 38
Atlantian, troopship, 236
 Auld, Rev. J. H. G., 256
 Australia, population c. 1900, 2; number of volunteers for South African War, 2; Federation, 3; casualties in South Africa, 4; sends troops, 386
 Australian Association, Johannesburg, 41
 Australian Corps, Johannesburg, 41
 Australian Medical Convention, 1908, 5
 Australians, The, at Sunnyside, 84; as scouts, 349-50; discipline, 351-54
 Australian Units
 - Artillery, 'A' Battery, RAA (NSW), 70, 232, 355-6
 - Cameron's Scouts, 264

Australian Units (continued)

- *Commonwealth Horse*, 3, 25, 47, 387-8.
 - 1st Australian Horse*, 34-5, 79, 102, 104, 139, 174, 187, 192, 202, 232
- New South Wales Citizens Bushmen's Contingent, 294; raised, 233-6; Biera to Bulawayo, 236-9; enters Zeerust, 250; enters Rustenburg, 241-2; Elands River Post, 258-74; Rhenosterkop battle, 296
- New South Wales Imperial Bushmen's Contingent, raised, 236, 240; at Elands River Post, 264, 281-2; Battle of Buffel's Hoek, 272-3
- New South Wales Imperial Bushmen's Contingent, *Third*, raised in Western Transvaal, 345
- New South Wales Lancers, 35, 60-2, 64, 68-9, 70, 72, 78, 101-2, 104, 119, 123, 131, 174, 189, 190-3, 195, 202, 232; at Diamond Jubilee, 26; embarks for Cape Town, 27; at Graspan, 68-9; at Magersfontein, 74-6; at Paardeberg, 139-40; at Carolina, 221; at Waterval prison camp, 223
- New South Wales Mounted Rifles, 34-5; Kimberley Lines of Communication, 64, 77-8, 80-1; march to Prieska, 85-6; Ramah, 118; trails Cronje, 125-6; Paardeberg Battle, 127-136; Poplar Grove, 137-8; Abrahams' Kraal, 139; Glen Siding, 174; Karee Siding, 184; Battle of Houtnek, 186-7; Vet River, 187-8; Zand River, 189; enter Transvaal, 192; advance on Pretoria, 203-5; enter Heidelberg, 205; Diamond Hill Battle, 208-11; relief of Elands River Post, 270; trailing de Wet, 275-7, 289-95; action at Bothaville, 292. **First NSW MR**, 362, 364. *A Squadron*, 133. *E Squadron*, formerly NSW Infantry, 78; Battle of Houtnek, 186-7. **Second NSW MR**, 348.
- Third NSW MR**, 103, 336-7, 344-5, 351, 359
 - Queensland (Imperial Bushmen) Contingent, *Fourth*, 306-7
 - Queensland (Imperial Bushmen) Contingent, *Fifth*, 356-7
 - Queensland Mounted Infantry: *First*, embarks, 34, 61; at Sunnyside, 81-3; enter Douglas, 83-4; advance to Modder, 119; advance to Kimberley, 123; at Paardeberg, 131; Poplar Grove, 137; Waterval Drift, 178-9; Brandford-Vet River, 187; Johannesburg, 197. *Second*, Brandford-Vet River, 187; Johannesburg, 197; Dulstroom, 369. *Third*, 249; embarks, 236; escorts Canadian artillery, 239; joins Plumer's column, 241; relief of Mafeking, 244-7; Koster River ambush, 253-5; Elands River Post, 259, 261, 263, 265-7, 272; Wol-verkuil, 306
 - South Australian (Bushmen) Contingent, *Third*, raised, 233; Captain Hubbe killed, 288; Oliphants River action, 319-20
 - South Australian Imperial Bushmen, *Fifth* and *Sixth*, action at Graspan, 327-8; at Grootvallyer, 335-6; ride to Bakenlaagte, 339; long treks, 348
 - South Australian Mounted Rifles, *First*, 34, 196-9. *Second*, 196-9, 362-3
 - Tasmanian (Bushmen) Contingent, *Second*, 259, 294
 - Tasmanian (Imperial Bushmen) Contingent, *Third*, ambush near Warm Bad, 293; Battle of Rhenosterkop, 295; Pietersburg ambush, 318-19
 - Tasmanian Mounted Infantry Contingent, *First*, embarks, 34; ambush near Rensburg, 108-9; Pink Hill action, 111; Black Reef mine, 196
 - Victorian (Bushmen) Contingent,

- Third*, Elands River Post, 259, 261, 263; Rhenosterkop, 296
- Victorian (Imperial Bushmen) Contingent, *Fourth*, trails de Wet, 305; Read's Drift action, 307; Sea Cow River action, 308
- Victorian Mounted Infantry Company, *First*, embarks, 34; converts to Mounted Infantry, 101-2; Rensburg ambush, 108; Hobkirk's Farm-Pink Hill, 111-12; withdraws to Arundel, 113-14; enters Middleburg, 215; enters Komati Poort, 218
- Victorian Mounted Rifles, *Second*, enter Colesberg, 114; at Germiston, 196; Komati Poort, 218, 382
- Victorian Mounted Rifles, *Fifth*, with General Beatson, 328; Wil-mansrust, 329-33; in Natal and Zululand, 334, 338, 357
- Western Australian (Bushmen) Contingent, *Third*, at Elands River Post, 259, 261, 263; trails de Wet, 306; ambush at De Berg Pass, 318
- Western Australian Mounted Infantry, *First*, action at Slingersfontein, 109-11, advance on Pretoria, 202-3; Battle of Diamond Hill, 208, 211; at Waterval Onder, 219; action at Palmietfontein, 275; action near Rensburg Drift, 290. *Second*, Vet River action, 188; Diamond Hill, 208, 211; Elands River Post, 270. *Fifth*, 324. *Sixth*, 324
- Medical Corps, *Australian*, 3, 5, 387; *New South Wales*, 82, 119, 123, 131, 134, 139, 180, 181-2, 189, 193-4, 207, 232, 271, 275, 277, 304
- Royal Military College, Duntroon, 126
- Special Service Officers, 6, 35, 119, 126, 128, 135-6, 139, 177, 216
- Avard, Tpr F., 221
- Babington, Maj.-Gen. J. M., 314
- Bach, Miss, 253-4
- Baden-Powell, Lt-Col R. S. S., 247-8, 251-2, 254, 260, 264, 293, 363; commands Mafeking, 244; enters Rustenburg, 250
- Bakenlaagte, 337-41
- Baker, Maj. A. B., 283-94
- Balfour, Rt Hon. A. J., 23
- Ball, Tpr S., 141
- Bamboo Creek, 238
- Bandolier Kop, 364
- Banks Drift, 128
- Bantu, 8, 9, 11, 29
- Baptist, Pte J., 98, 163, 165
- Baragwanah, 196
- Barkly West, 21
- Barton, Rt Hon. Sir Edmund, 25, 300, 333, 362, 370, 379, 386
- Barton, Maj.-Gen. G., 94, 96, 289
- Bashford, Tpr F. F., 215
- Bastard's Nek, 111
- Bastion Hill, 146-8
- Battye, Lt A. E. M., 294
- Bean, C. E. W., 4
- Beatson, Maj.-Gen. S. B., 328, 330, 332, 333-4
- Beauchamp, Earl, 35
- Beaumont, Tpr A., 287
- Bechuanaland, 19
- Begbie, Capt. A. R. G., 359
- Beira, 236-7
- Beit, Alfred, 20
- Bell, Lt F. W., V/C, 324-5
- Belmont, 60-1, 78, 81, 83-4
- Bennett, Maj. A. J., 290
- Benson, Lt-Col G. E., 71, 337-40
- Bergendal Farm, 217
- Berlin Missionary Society, 378
- Berry, J., 64
- Berry, Capt. J. K., 307
- Bester, Mr and Mrs, 313
- Bethal, 309, 337, 357
- Bethlehem, 275
- Bethulie, 36, 173
- Bethune, Lt-Col E. C., 88
- Bevan, Tpr W. F., 227

Beyers, Gen. C. F., 304, 319
 Bidsmead, Nursing Sister, M. S., 233
 Bird, Tpr F. J., 261, 266
 Birdwood, Capt. W. R., 92, 96
 Birkenstock, Mr, 390
 Bisdee, Tpr J. H., V.C., 293
 Blackaby, Tpr H., 293
 Blair, Cpl J., 255
 Blencowe, Tpr A. W., 105
 Blockhouse System, 341-2, 353, 358, 385, 389
 Bloemfontein Conference, 22-3
 Bloemfontein, 106, 118, 124-5, 140-1, 173-4, 176; water supply, 179; under British occupation, 181
 Blood, Lt-Gen. Sir Bindon, 324
 Boardman, Rev. J., 253
 Boer Forces, 53, *Johannesburg Commando*, 38. *Carolina Commando*, 152, 157, 219. *Harrismith Commando*, 54, 56. *Krugerdsorp Commando*, 38. *Wakkerstroom Commando*, 92
 Boer tactics, 29, 323, 343-6, 393-4
 Boksburg, 196
 Bonner, Tpr J., 174-5
 Bonner, Tpr W. T., 174
 Bonus, Maj. J., 159
 Bosman, Magistrate, 389
 Botha, Gen. C., 215
 Botha, Gen. Louis, 4, 24, 91, 147, 165, 189, 191, 193, 196, 201, 204, 206-8, 211, 214-5, 217, 285, 304, 309, 334; battle of Colenso, 94-8; at Spion Kop, 152-3, 157-8; on burning farm houses, 287; on surrendered burghers, 301-2; attends peace talks, 310; attacks Natal, 336-7; at Bakenlaagte, 338; at Vereeniging, 389; on concentration camps, 391; at Versailles, 394
 Bothasberg, 358
 Bothaville, 292
 Bowen, Tpr, 218
 Brady, Tpr W. H., 105
 Braithwaite, Maj. W. P., 157
 Brandfort, 187
 Brandt, Cpl P., 336
 Brassey, Lord, 34
 Braun, Lt C. L., 210
 Breckenridge, Tpr T. W., 202
 Brent, Sgt H., 238
 Bretag, Tpr F. W., 188
 Bridges, Maj. W. T., 4, 33, 126, 174
 Brigden, Tpr, 193
 Brissender, Tpr A., 147
 Bristow, Mrs, 372
 British army, 29, 70-1, 74, 76-7, 93, 103, 127-8, 158; strength, 31; dispositions 185. *Artillery*, 50, 70, 72, 74, 81, 99, 175, 245, 283. *Engineers*, 29, 53, 69, 122, 140. *Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders*, 130. *Black Watch*, 3, 70-1, 76, 128. *Cameron Highlanders*, 373. *City Imperial Volunteers*, 208, 350. *Coldstream Guards*, 66-7. *Connaught Rangers*, 168. *Derbyshire Regiment*, 208. *Devonshire Regiment*, 46, 55, 94. *Dorsetshire Regiment*, 151. *Dragoon Guards*, 52, 305, 336. *Dublin Fusiliers*, 89, 168. *Essex Regiment*, 130, 139. *Gloucestershire Regiment*, 132, 139. *Gordon Highlanders*, 36, 46-7, 72, 194, 317. *Grenadier Guards*, 26, 61. *Hampshire Mtd Infantry*, 351. *Household Cavalry*, 178. *Hussars*, 46, 178. *Imperial Yeomanry*, 185, 237, 300-1, 322, 323. *Inniskilling Dragoons*, 109, 111, 123, 201. *Irish Fusiliers*, 94. *Kings Own Yorkshire L.I.*, 63. *K.R.R.C.*, 153. *Lancashire Fusiliers*, 149, 152-3, 168. *Lancers*, 60, 64, 70, 72, 74, 208, 345. *Life Guards*, 178. *Liverpool Regiment*, 52. *Manchester Regiment*, 54. *Middlesex*, 151, 153, 159. *Mounted Infantry*, 125, 130, 132, 178, 195, 291-2. *Northumberland Fusiliers*, 178, 311, 323, 386. *Northamptonshire Regiment*, 61, 67, 100. *North Lancashire Regiment*, 122. *Paget's Horse*, 263, 282, 323. *Royal Irish Rifles*, 325. *Royal Lancaster Regiment*, 149. *Royal Scots Fusiliers*, 88, 94, 205. *Scots Greys*, 123. *Scottish Rifles*, 153. *Scottish Horse*, 337-8, 339. *Seaforth Highlanders*, 71. *Somerset Light Infantry*, 156. *South*

Lancaster Regiment, 149. *Sussex Regiment*, 208. *Welsh Regiment*, 139. *West Riding Regiment*, 295. *Wiltshire Regiment*, 111. *Yorkshire L.I.*, 67, 103, 128, 132
 British Government, 14-15, 353; takes control of Cape Territory, 8-9; annexes Natal and Transvaal, 11, 13; signs Pretoria and London Conventions, 21; maintains British role as paramount power in South Africa, 22; rejects Boer ultimatum, 23
 - War Office, 5, 39, 98, 274, 286, 335, 368, 377; accepts colonial troops, 34; releases sentenced Australians, 333; cables Australian Government on deportation of Major Lenchan, 376; hushes up court martial proceedings, 379-80
 British Navy, 24, 63, 154, 286
 Bronkhorst Spruit, 14, 211, 214
 Broodwood, Lt-Gen. R. G., 126, 139-40, 174, 176-7, 202, 270
 Brooke, Maj. E. W., 293
 Brown, Tpr C., 135
 Brown, Cpl E. S., 293
 Brown, Tpr G. H., 293
 Brown, Capt. H. H., 287-8
 Brownell, Tpr E., 326
 Bruche, Capt. J. H., 3
 Buch, Tpr G., 166
 Bucholtz, Tpr J., 106
 Buffels Hoek, 282
 Bulawayo, 239
 Buller, General Sir Redvers, V.C., 27, 31, 59, 60, 99, 101, 143, 145, 152-4, 158-9, 163, 165-6, 190, 205; battle of Colenso, 91-8; retains command in Natal, 117; decision to attack Spion Kop, 148; decides to attack Vaal Krantz, 162; fourth attempt to cross Tugela River, 164; Boers forced from Natal, 215; at Bergendal, 217
Bulletin (Sydney), 363
 Burger, Schalk W., 25, 388
 Burgers, President T. F., 11, 12-14, opposed by Kruger, 21

Burgess, Sister D., 168
 Burgher Peace Committee, 300, 342
 Burgin, Tpr A. A., 120
 Burke, Tpr J. B., 284
 Burleigh, Bennett, 29, 363
 Burns, L.-Cpl J., 274
 Bush, Tpr G.,
 Busby, Bugler W. N., 357
 Bushman's Kopje, 175
 Bushveldt Carbineers, 363, 365-6, 370-1, 374, 381; raised in Nth Transvaal, 362; at Fort Edward, 364; disbanded, 368; activities as Special Force, 377; War Office propaganda, 379
 Butcher, Tpr A. J., 114
 Butler, C., 38
 Butters, Capt., 258, 260, 265, 267-8, 270
 Button, Tpr A., 109
 Byrne, Tpr J. J., 63-4
 Byrne, Pte S. M., 134
 Byron, Col J. J., 62, 70, 74

 Caesar's Camp, 53-4, 167
 Canadian Army, *Artillery*, 237, 250. *Infantry*, 128, 132, 135, 194
 Cameron, Tpr A., 208, 210
 Cameron, Capt. C. St C., 108
 Cameron, Maj. J. McL., 264
 Campbell, Tpr, 230
 Campbell, Tpr W. J., 293
 Cape Colony, 2; early settlement, 7; Boer uprising, 24, 115
 Cape Town, 9, 36, 88
 Carington, Lt-Col R. C. G., 345
 Carlisle, Lt, 144
 Carolina, 221, 309
 Carr, A., 158
 Carrington, Lt-Gen. Sir Frederick, 237, 239, 259, 264-5, 282
 Casualties: *Australian*, 4. *Boer*, 393. *British*, Talana Hill, 44, Elandslaagte, 48, Ladysmith, 55, Belmont, 61, Graspan, 64, Modder River, 68, Magersfontein, 73, Colenso, 97, Stormberg Junction, 100, Paardeberg,

Casualties (continued)

- 133, Poplar Grove, 138, in final battle to relieve Ladysmith, 167, Spion Kop, 158, Vaal Krantz, 163, Diamond Hill, 212, Koster River Ambush, 256, Elands River Post, 271, Buffel's Hoek, 283, Rhenosterkop, 296, total British casualties, 393
- Caughey, Tpr F. H., 334
- Cecil, Lord, 282
- Celliers, Gen. J. G., 311
- Central Front, 99, 101
- Cetewayo, 14
- Chadwick, Sgt G. A., 248
- Chamberlain, Rt Hon. Joseph, 23-5, 236, 386
- Chauvel, Capt. H., 82-3, 122
- Chieveley, 88-9, 98, 163-4, 167
- Childe, Maj., 147
- Chomley, Lt, 220
- Chrisp, Lt J. G., 334
- Christian, Lt S. E., 356
- Christie, Maj. A. J., 135
- Christie, Lt H. B., 251-2
- Church, Capt., 220
- Churchill, Winston S., 28, 55, 89-90, 147-8, 155-6, 159, 167, 198
- Cingolo Kopjes, 164
- Clark, Pte, 184
- Clarkson, Cpl H. W., 188
- Clements, Maj.-Gen. R. A. P., 107, 111-12, 114
- Clery, Lt-Gen. Sir Francis, 216
- Cobb, Tpr J., 308
- Codrington, Col A. E., 66
- Coetzee Drift, 188
- Coke, Maj.-Gen. J. T., 151-2, 157
- Colenso, 87-92, 94, 96, 98, 143, 164-5
- Colesberg, 27, 60, 79, 102-3, 107, 109, 111, 114-15
- Coleskop, 103, 113-14
- Colley, Maj.-Gen. Sir George, 14
- Collins, Lt A. E., 270
- Collins, L.-Cpl E., 183
- Collins, Tpr J., 314
- Colquhoun, Lt-Cdr W. J., 136-7
- Colville, Lt-Gen. Sir Henry, 132-3
- Commando Nek, 264, 293
- Commandos, formation and equipping of, 28; number in field, 31, 335, 393
- Conan Doyle, Sir Arthur, 273
- Concentration Camps, 294, 300-3, 390-2
- Concreve, Tpr F. J., 48
- Conical Hill, 148, 151
- Conie, Lt, 74
- Connell, Tpr, 104
- Consolidated Goldfields, 41
- Conway, Cpl M., 110-11
- Cook, Lt B. W., 357
- Cooper, Tpr G. T., 287
- Cope, Lt W., 2, 235, 260, 263, 282
- Cornwall, troopship, 34
- Cornwall, Lt C., 282
- Cortis, Capt. W. R., 210
- Cotton, Lt, 332
- Coughlan, Sgt A. W., 302, 322
- Coveny, Lt-Col R., 3
- Cowley, Tpr N., 245
- Cox, Lt-Col C. F., 26-7, 101-3, 359
- Coxhead, Tpr A., 114
- Crofton, Lt-Col M., 151
- Cronje, Gen. Andries, 387
- Cronje, Gen. Piet, 20, 65, 121, 124, 135-7, 167, 244; defends Magersfontein, 69; retires from Magersfontein, 125; at Paardeberg, 126-7, 130-1; surrenders, 133
- Crooke-Lawless, Surgeon Maj. W. R., 345
- Cross, Tpr E. H., 47
- Culliford, Tpr E., 306
- Currie, Lt M., 47
- Cutlack, F. M., 380
- Crow's Nest, 194
- Daily Mail* (London), 310
- Daily News* (London), 108
- Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 235, 240
- Dale, Tpr H. J., 211
- Dallimore, Capt. J., 308
- Darby, Pte F. A., 390
- Darley, Sir Frederick, 35, 235
- Darling, Lt H. F., 292
- Dartnell, Col J., 49
- Davidson, Tpr F., 266
- Davidson, Tpr G., 349
- Davies, Maj. W. K., *see* Karri-Davies, Maj. W.
- Davis, Cpl H. F., 320
- Davis, Tpr V., 187
- Davis, Tpr W. G., 296
- De Aar, 60, 77, 85, 90, 132, 307
- Deakin, Hon. Alfred, 25
- Dean, Lt, 136
- De Beer, Comdt J. F., 325
- De Beers Mining Co., 122
- De Berg Pass, 318
- De Clercq, J., 389
- Deegan, Cpl L., 114
- De Jager, Field Cornet Z., 56
- De Kiel Drift, 119
- De La Rey, Gen. J. H., 24, 65, 69, 70, 104, 107-9, 114, 189, 196, 257, 266, 270, 285, 310, 343, 347, 385; at Olifants Nek, 252; at Elands River Post, 260; attacks Lichtenburg, 311, 314, 316, 327; at Klerksdorp peace discussions, 285
- Delagoa Bay, 12-14, 21, 36, 38, 217
- De Lisle, Col H. B., 203-4, 208-9, 292, 327, 336
- De Villiers, Comdt C. J., 53, 56
- De Villiers, Field Cornet, Jacob, 56
- de Wet, Gen. Christiaan R., 39, 114, 118, 124, 131-2, 138, 175-6, 189, 206, 213, 270, 279, 289, 309, 326, 342; Sannah's Post ambush, 177; trailed by British, 275; action at Vredefort, 276; rallies Boers, 285; defeated at Bothaville, 292; enters Cape Colony, 304-5; escapes into Orange Free State, 307; faces drive in east O.F.S., 358-9; at Klerksdorp peace discussions, 388; at Vereeniging, 393
- de Wet, Sir Jacobus, 41
- de Wet, Piet, 176-7, 342
- Dewetsdorp, 293, 304
- de Wets Drift, 290
- Dewson, Tpr T. W., 283
- Diamond Hill Battle, 206-12
- Dickinson, Lt, 325
- Dickson, Hon. Sir James, 33
- Dieplaagte Drift, 214
- Digby Jones, Lt R. J. T., *V/C*, 53, 56
- Disease, 5, 6, 52, 221, 239-40
- Dobbin, Capt. W. W., 249, 309
- Doherty, L.-Cpl R. J., 36, 162
- Doney, L.-Cpl E. O. H., 281
- Donkin, Sgt L., 267-8, 269, 271
- Dooley, Sgt J. S., 103, 120, 122
- Doornkop, 20, 193-5
- Doris*, HMS, 64
- Douglas, 81-3
- Douglas, Tpr Ashton, 210
- Douglas, Maj.-Gen. C. W. H., 313
- Douglas, Lt F. J., 266, 270
- Dove, Lt F. A., 186, 280, 292
- Doveton, Maj. D. E., 56
- Dowling, Gnr, 165
- Dowling, Capt. W. V., 104-6
- Drage, Lt P. W. C., 209-10, 347
- Drakensberg Passes, 27
- Drew, Tpr C. L., 84
- Driefontein, 139
- Drickuilen, 306
- Drininan, Tpr, 315
- Dronfield, 122
- Du Frayer, Pte A. H., 184
- Duka, Capt. A. T., 259, 261, 268
- Dullstroom, 369
- Dundee, 27, 43-6, 50
- Dundonald, Maj.-Gen. Lord, 91, 96, 144-5, 147, 165
- Dunn, Cpl A., 54
- Dunn, Capt. S. S., 296
- Du Preez Drift, 189
- Durban, 11, 23, 36-8, 47, 87-8
- Dutch East India Company, 7-8
- Eames, Tpr W. W., 227
- Ebeling, Lt G. A., 80, 215
- Ebsworth, Lt A., 215
- Echlin, Capt. R. B., 253
- Eckford, Capt. G. A., 256
- Eddy, Maj. G. A., 111-12, 114
- Edward VII, King, 64
- Edward, Fort, 364-8, 371-2
- Edwards, Maj. C. A., 181

- Eland, Sgt F., 365-6
 Elandsfontein, 193, 195
 Elandslaagte, 39, 46, 48, 50
 Elands River Post, 251, 279, 293, 300;
 siege of, 257-74
 Elliot, Maj.-Gen. E. L., 391
 Elliott, Tpr H. E., 309
 Ellis, Lt, 162
 Ellis, Tpr G., 160, 162
 Ellis, Tpr W. M., 217
 Eloff, Miss, 303
 Eloff, Field Cornet, 244, 303
 English, Cpl P. J., 138
 Enslin, 76-80
 Ermelo, 309, 336, 356
 Erroll, Brig.-Gen., 283, 288
 Estcourt, 87-8, 90, 274
 Evans, George Essex, 274
Evening News (Sydney), 134, 174
 Eyres, Tpr T., 113
 Ezzy, Tpr A., 314
- Fahey, Tpr J. J., 314
 Farriers, 32
 Ferris, Tpr J. J., 147
 Fetherstonhaugh, L.-Cpl C., 207
 Fewkes, Tpr W., 316
 Fiaschi, Maj. T. H., 134-5, 181
 "Fighting 28", 60, 64, 78, 102, 221
 Firms, Lt T., 341
 Firth, Capt., 354
 Fisher, Sgt A., 135, 230
 Fisher, Warrant Officer, C. E., 107
 Fisher, Tpr J., 166
 Fisher, Tpr W. J. W., 113
 Fish River, 8-11
 Fitzgerald, Tpr, 56
 Fitzhardinge, Cpl A. F., 28
 Fitzpatrick, Capt. A., 94, 215
 Fleming, Sgt G. H., 209-10
 Florida, 194
 Forbes, Bugler A. E., 255
 Force, Tpr H., 219
 Ford, Cpl J., 124
 Ford, Tpr J. M., 224
 Forrest, Tpr H. E., 255
 Forrest, Sir John, 354
- Fort Edward, 364-8, 371, 372
Fortunas, troopship, 354
 Fortune, Tpr J., 261
 Fort Wylie, 93-6, 98, 164-5
 Fox, Tpr W., 84
 Fraser, L.-Cpl J. E., 223
 Fraser, L.-Cpl W., 318
 Frederickstad, 289
 French, Maj.-Gen. J., 47, 51, 79, 101,
 117-19, 123, 127, 138, 185-6, 214, 336;
 at Elandslaagte, 46; engaged Central
 front, 60; recalled to Cape Town, 107;
 enters Kimberley, 121; halts Cronje at
 Paardeberg, 126; Poplar Grove,
 137-8; at Zand River, 189-90; enters
 Transvaal, 191; action near Johannes-
 burg, 193-5; action at Kalk Heuvel,
 201-2; action Kameel Fontein Valley,
 207; Middleburg, 215; East Transvaal
 drive, 309-10; engaged in Cape Col-
 ony, 385
 Frere, 89-91, 156
 Fulton, Capt., 283
- Gallipoli, 1, 126
 Garratt, Col F. S., 359
 Gartside, Lt R., 263, 297, 306
 Gatacre, Maj.-Gen. Sir W., 60, 99,
 100-1, 175
 George, Sgt W. A., 318
 German south-west Africa, 19
 Germany, interest in Transvaal, 13-14,
 21; Emperor of, 19, 21
 Germiston, 197-8, 217, 339
 Gibson, Tpr G. H. F., 283
 Gibson, Capt. W., 296, 318
 Gilchrist, Trumpeter C. A., 102
 Gildea, Col, 202
 Gilfillan, Cpl J. R., 77
 Gilham, Tpr A., 109
 Gillard, Dvr T. M., 355
 Gillies, Tpr N. P., 256, 264
 Gilpin, Lt A. G., 283-4
 Glencoe, 44
 Glen Siding, 174
 Goddard, Tpr, 54
 Gold, 2, 15, 16, 19, 21, 40
- Good Hope, Cape of, 7
 Gordon, Gen. C. G., 2
 Gordon, Brig.-Gen. J. M., 196
 Gordon, Brig.-Gen. J. R. P., 214
 Goschen, G. J., 137
 Gough, Lt-Col B., 64
 Gough, Maj. H. de la P., 167
 Gould, Lt A. C. M., 281
 Gould, Nursing Sister E. J., 293
 Gourley, Sgt, 104
 Grant, Sgt N., 111
 Graspan, 62, 68
 Great Trek, 10, 15, 24
 Green, Padre James, 32, 264, 272, 282,
 293, 323
 Green, Tpr J., 307
 Green, Capt. T. A., 304
 Green Hill, 145, 164-5
 Gregg, L.-Cpl A. N., 325-6
 Grewar, Sgt L. D., 328
 Grey, Tpr A. J., 175
 Grey, Lt-Col R., 315
 Gribble, L.-Cpl W., 113
 Grieve, Lt G. J., 128, 136
 Griffen, Sgt-Maj. G. A., 105, 107
 Griffith, Capt. J. de B., 238, 248
 Grobler, Gen., 111, 332, 338
 Groom, Tpr F. A., 293
 Grootvallier, 335
 Grosvenor, Lady, 230
 Gulson, Tpr K., 268
 Gun Hill, Bakenlaagte, 338-9
 Gun Hill, Ladysmith, 52
- Haggard, H. Rider, 13
 Haig, Maj. Douglas, 51, 101
 Haldane, Capt. J. A. L., 89
 Hales, A. G., 5, 27, 106, 108, 110
 Hall, Col F. H., 319, 365, 367-8, 376
 Halsall, Tpr F., 330
 Ham, Capt. D. J., 259, 261, 296, 303,
 324, 343, 354
 Hamilton, Maj.-Gen. B. M., 305
 Hamilton, Col H. I. W., 369-70
 Hamilton, Lt-Gen. Sir Ian, 40, 177, 203,
 214-15; defence of Wagon Hill and
 Caesar's Camp, 53-6; begins advance
 to Pretoria, 185; Vet and Sand Rivers,
 187-8; Six Mile Spruit, 202; Diamond
 Hill, 208-9; fails to head off de Wet,
 278; action at Roodeval, 387
 Hammam, Miss G., 311
 Hammett, Sgt-Maj. E., 368
 Handcock, Lt P. J., 361, 364-5, 367, 369,
 371, 375-81; executed, 372
 Handley, Lewis, 383
 Hanley, Sgt T., 36
 Hannam, Lt C. H. G., 368
 Hannay, Col O. C., 118, 125, 128, 130
 Hardie, Tpr A., 84
 Harkus, Cpl R. E., 137, 174
 Harriott, Lt W. R., 209-10
 Harris, Lt H. J. I., 187
 Harris, Lt S., 188
 Harris, Tpr W., 253
 Harrison, George, 16
 Harrison, Cpl H., 334
 Hart, Maj.-Gen. A. F. R., 93, 148, 270
 Harth, Tpr F., 266
 Harvey, Capt., 283
 Hasslet, Capt., 344
 Haycroft, Trumpeter H., 220
 Hayward, Tpr L. F., 189
 Heckpoort Valley, 278
 Heidelberg, 205
 Henry, Lt-Col St G. C., 178, 195
 Hensman, Lt G. G. W., 110-11
Herald (Melbourne), 108
 Heritage, Lt F. B., 108
 Heron, Lt R. M., 104, 105, 221
Hertzog, German ship, 382
 Hertzog, Comdt J. B. M., 305
 Hesse, C. H. D., 367, 372, 377, 378-9
 Hickey, Tpr E. P., 252
 Higgins, Cpl R., 355
 Hildyard, Maj.-Gen. H. J. T., 88-9, 94
 Hill, Lt-Col A., 159
 Hill, Tpr S. E., 82-3
 Hilliard, Capt. M. A., 211
 Hillier, Tpr J., 261
 Himmelhock, Tpr, 98
 Hindman, James, 36
 Hindmarsh, Tpr H. E., 193
 Hines, Nursing Sister F., 249

Hinton, Tpr H. G., 83
 Hlangwane, 92, 95-8, 164-6
 Hoad, Col J. C., 79
 Hobkirk's Farm, 111
 Hoffman, Tpr E. M., 209
 Holman, Capt. R. C., 210, 347-8
 Holman, Hon. W. A., 211
 Holme, Tpr C. B., 369
 Holmes, Capt. W., 80, 211, 231, 280
 Hopkins, Capt. W. F., 112
 Hore, Lt-Col C. O., 40, 259, 266-71
 Hornabrook, Dr R. W., 47, 57
 Hospitals, Royal Commission on, 33
 Hottentots, 8
 Houtnek, 185
 Howse, Lt N., VC, 194, 276
 Hubbe, Capt. S. G., 233, 288
 Huddart, Midshipman C., 64
 Hughes, Pte, 159-60
 Hughes, Cpl Llewellyn, 369
 Huguenots, 7
 Humphries, Pte G., 90
 Hungerford, Lt T., 316
 Hunt, Col, 95
 Hunt, Capt. P., 363-7, 370-1, 373, 375
 Hunt, Sgt W. F., 273
 Hunter, Lt-Gen. Sir Archibald, 31, 99,
 190, 213-14
 Hussar Hill, 164
 Hutton, Maj.-Gen. E., 3, 187, 376

 India, 23
 Indulgence Passages, 354
 Inglis, Capt. A., 341
 Ingoldby, Maj. F. J., 256
 Intombi, 53, 57, 167
 Isaac, Rev. E., 312
 Isandhlwana, 14, 87
 Ivey, Nursing Sister, 237

 Jackson's Drift, 193, 194
 Jacobsdal, 124, 126, 131
 Jacobsrust, 186
 Jameson, Dr L. S., 19-20
 Jameson Raid, 20-1, 46, 194, 197
 Jeffries, Sgt, 160
 Jenkins, Capt. D. H., 141

Jericho, T. V. L., 343
 Johannesburg, 2, 18, 36, 193, 196; pre-war population, 17; surrender of, 197-8
 Johannesburg Waterworks, 196
 Johnson, Lt, 197-8
 Johnson, Surgeon, 366
 Johnson, Tpr J., 124
 Johnson, W., 90
 Johnston, Capt. G. J., 119, 136
 Johnstone, Capt. R., VC, 47
 Jones, Tpr C., 113
 Jones, Surgeon-Maj. F. W. Caton, 52
 Joubert, Gen. Piet, 21, 24, 50, 53, 91-2

 Kaffir's Drift, 153
 Kalk Heuvel, 201
 Karee, 184
 Karridale, 42
 Karri-Davies, Maj. W., 20, 39-42, 46-7,
 52, 57, 199, 246
 Kearns, Tpr J. V., 160-2
 Kekewich, Col R. G., 122-3, 387
 Kellie, Capt. C. W., 239, 247
 Kelly, Field-Cornet, 367, 373
 Kelly, Tpr J., 84
 Kelly, Lt J. B., 341
 Kelly, Lt-Col N. W., 288, 323
 Kelly, Lt-Col R. V., 271
 Kelly, Maj.-Gen. Sir William, 373
 Kennedy, Mrs B., 168
 Kent, troopship, 35
 Keogh, Bugler H. W., 256
 Kerans, Cpl E., 79
 Kermode, Cpl T., 336
 Khartoum, 2-3
 Kilpatrick, Cpl F. I., 60, 105
 Kimberley, 19, 34, 65, 69, 77, 124-6, 136,
 199; besieged, 27; Roberts plans relief,
 118; General French enters, 121; defence measures, 122-3
 Kimberley, Lord, 18
 King, Tpr F., 252
 King, Tpr F. W., 264
 King, Tpr J., 244
 Kirby, Lt M. T., 196
 Kitchener, Gen. Lord, 39-42, 270-1,

273-4, 307, 316, 319, 321-2, 363, 367,
 369, 374-5, 377-8, 385, 388; Chief of
 Staff to Roberts, 99; directs pursuit of
 Cronje, 125-6; commands assault on
 Paardeberg, 127-30; C-in-C South
 Africa, 299; scorched earth policy,
 301-2; initiates peace proposals, 310;
 allows Boers to contact Kruger,
 323-4; estimates Boer strength in
 field, 335; attempts capture of Botha,
 336-7; introduces blockhouse lines,
 341-2; treatment of Boers in British
 uniform, 345-6; drive in East Transvaal,
 358-62; drive in West Transvaal,
 387; refuses camp intake of
 women and children, 390; meets Boer
 Peace Committee, 392; sets deadline
 for peace agreement, 393
 Kitchener, Maj.-Gen. F. W., 369
 Kitchener's Kopje, 130
 Klip Drift, 119, 121, 125, 127
 Klip River (Natal), 49
 Klip River Drift, 167
 Klip River (Transvaal), 193-4
 Klip River Station, 195
 Klipriviersberg, 193
 Knight, Col G. C., 292
 Knox, Maj.-Gen. C. E., 289, 305
 Knudsen, Tpr P., 83-4
 Knyvett, Lt F. B., 357
 Koedoesrand Drift, 125, 128
 Komati Poort, 215, 218, 362
 Koorn Spruit, 176
 Koster River, 253-6
 Krause, Dr, 197
 Kritzingen, Comdt, 305
 Kroonstad, 189-90
 Kruger, Jan, 303
 Kruger, President Paul, 1, 11, 14, 22, 26,
 35-6, 40-1, 133, 189, 237, 393; opposes
 President Burgers, 12; becomes President
 of Transvaal State, 15; encourages
 minerals research, 16; stand
 against foreigners, 18; friendship with
 Germany, 19; position strengthened
 by Jameson raid, 21; declares war, 24;
 warns England, 25; at Poplar Grove,

138; leaves Pretoria, 201; passes into
 exile, 218; advises against surrender,
 324
 Kruger, Piet, 250
 Krugersdorp, 14, 20
 Krygger, Tpr A., 110-11

 Labram, G., 122
 Ladysmith, 27, 37, 45-6, 50-8, 88, 90-2,
 96, 98-9, 101, 145-6, 155, 157, 163,
 165-6, 170, 221; population, 49; relief
 of, 167-9
 Laing's Nek, 14, 50, 215-16
 Lambie, W. J., 75, 80, 85, 102, 108-9
 Lang, Tpr, 160
 Langham, Tpr, 316
 Langlaagte, 16
 Langley, Capt. E. J., 328
 Langton Grange, troopship, 34
 Lawson, Henry, 363
 Learmouth, Lt F. L., 292
 Leask, Lt J., 256
 Lee, Maj. G. L., 201
 Lees, Cpl D., 239, 296
 Le Gallais, Lt-Col P. W. J., 292
 Legge, Lt G. H., 277
 Legge, Capt. J. G., 81
 Legh, Tpr G., 252
 Lemmer, Gen., 251-3, 257, 282-3,
 313-14
 Lemmer's Hill, 283
 Lenehan, Maj. R. W., 362, 364-5,
 368-9, 371-3, 376-7
 Lenthall, C., 37
 Lewes, 333, 377
 Lewis, Capt. R. C., 295, 305, 349, 351
 Lichtenburg, 206, 250, 311-14, 352
 Limpopo River, 23
 Lindique Drift, 192
 Lindsay, Tpr H., 56
 Lindsay, Capt. M. W. H., 341
 Livingstone, David, 9-10
 Lloyd, Lt-Col G., 295
 London Convention, 15, 22
 London Missionary Society, 9
 Long, Col C. J., 93, 95, 98
 Loveday, Gnr L., 355-6

- Lowry, Rev. E., 219
 Luipaardsvlei, 20
 Lynch, Col A., 381-3
 Lynch, Lt G. H., 197
 Lynch, Lt T. J., 239
 Lyne, Rt Hon. Sir William, 35, 235, 265, 300
 Lyttelton, Lt-Gen. N. G., 94, 144-5, 153
- McClymont, L.-Cpl G., 316
 McColl, Lt J. P., 347
 McColl, Warrant Officer J. T., 359
 MacCormac, Sir William, 33
 MacCormick, Maj. A., 194
 McCracken, Tpr J., 189
 McCulloch, Lt W., 309
 Macdonald, Donald, 56-7
 Macdonald, Maj.-Gen. H. A., 128
 McDonald, Lt J., 315
 McDonald, Sgt P., 63
 MacFarlane, Capt. S. C., 336
 McGee, Tpr, 217
 McGillivray, Sgt-Maj. J., 390
 Machadodorp, 218
 MacHattie, Capt. T., 252
 McInnis, Tpr R., 284, 309, 362, 368, 389
 Mackay, Col J. A. K., 34
 Mackellar, Tpr A. R., 314
 Mackellar, Sir Charles, 220
 Mackellar, Dorothea, 220
 Mackellar, Lt K. K., 219-20, 343
 Mackenzie, Maj., 169
 McKnight, Maj. W., 328-9, 331-3
 McLean, Lt A. A., 133
 McLeod, Tpr D. C., 82
 McPherson, Sgt, 341
 Macready, Agnes, 232
 McWilliams, Lt-Col G. F., 275, 288
 Maddocks, Capt., 104
 Maeder's Farm, 103, 112-13
 Mafeking, 19, 20, 27, 41, 199, 206, 227-8, 247-9, 281, 282, 284, 294, 299; under siege, 243-4; relief of, 245-6
 Mageliesberg Range, 265, 285; de Wet escapes through, 278-9
 Magato Nek, 251, 253-4, 256, 264, 280
- Magersfontein Range, 78, 99, 121, 124, 136, 231; Cronje prepares defences, 69; battle, 70-7; Cronje withdraws, 125
 Maher, Tpr J., 96
 Mahon, Col B. T., 244-5
 Mair, Lt J., 328
 Majuba Hill, 14-15, 24, 36, 44, 56, 387; Majuba Day, 133, 215, 216
 Malcolm, Sgt J. A., 230
 Maori Wars, 2
 Maps, Military, 31
 Marabastad, 318
 Marandellas, 237-8, 365
 Marico River, 251, 258, 263-4, 280
 Marshall, Tpr F., 163-4, 170-1, 216-18
 Martin, Nursing Sister M., 327
 Martin, Capt. T. M., 304
 Martyr, Lt-Col C. G., 177
 Masterson, Lt J. E. L., VC, 55
 Masterton, Tpr J. T., 261
 Matchett, Nursing Sister A. L., 180
 Matthews, Edith, 311-13
 Matthews family, 313
 May, L.-Cpl M. J., 233
 Maygar, Lt L. C., VC, 333-4
 Mead, Cpl H. N. R., 327
Medic, troopship, 34
 Melhuish, Vet.-Lt F. W., 123
 Methuen, Lt-Gen. Lord, 101, 271, 288-9, 385; in Battle of Belmont, 60-1; Battle of Graspan, 62-3; Battle of Modder River, 64-8; Battle of Magersfontein, 69-77; at Rustenburg, 100, 252; chases General de Wet, 278; marches to Elands River Post and Mafeking, 280; commands West Transvaal, 294; gains Australians' respect, 347; wounded at Tweebosch, 386
 Meyer, Gen. Lukas, 24, 43-4, 204, 370
 Meyer's Farm, 199
 Middleburg, 207, 214, 328; Victorian troopers court-martialled, 332-4
 Middleton, L.-Cpl O. F. H., 238, 273
 Milford, T., 310
 Millar, Tpr L. J., 309
 Miller, Gnr A., 45, 49
- Miller, Maj. D., 344
 Milner, Sir Alfred, 25, 42; Bloemfontein conference, 22; supports unconditional surrender, 41; on Boer strength, 99; peace discussions, 388, 392-3; Versailles, 394
 Milton, Maj. P. W., 74
 Mitchell, Sqn Sgt-Maj. J., 268
 Mitchell Library, 378
 Modder River, 29, 70, 76, 119-20, 125-6, 137, 139, 174, 176, 177-8, 300; battle of, 65-8
 Modder River Station, 64, 76, 78, 117, 136
 Modder River Waterworks, 176
 Moffatt, J., 38
 Molloy, Tpr E. P., 306
 Molopo River, 245
 Molteno, 99-100
 Money, Lt-Col C. G. C., 312
 Monte Cristo Hill, 164
 Mooi River, 90-1, 151
 Moor, Maj. H. G., 109, 111, 211, 276
 Moore, Tpr C., 349
 Moore, Tpr W. M., 280
 Moorecroft, Mrs A., 313
 Morant, Admiral Sir Digby, 362
 Morant, Lt H. H., 355-69; execution, 377-8, 380-1
Morayshire, troopship, 354
 Morison, Sgt-Maj., 364
Morning Post (London), 148
 Morris, Maj., 328
 Morris, Tpr T. C., 120
 Morrow, Tpr J. H., 374
 Moss, Tpr G., 82
 Mount Alice, 144, 153-4, 155, 157, 163
 Mount Umbulwana, 53
 Moy, Tpr P. J., 316
 Mullen, G., 100
 Muller, Gen. C. H., 295, 329, 331
 Mullins, Capt. C. H., VC, 47
 Munro, Tpr J., 289
 Munro, Tpr R. T., 138
 Murray, Capt. A. C., 339-41
 Murray, Maj. F. D., 341
- Naaauwpoort, 38, 101, 186, 305
 Nash, Lt-Col W., 159
 Natal, 2, 43, 215, 336; annexed by Britain, 11; supports Uitlanders, 24; joins Union of South Africa, 373
 Natal Spruit, 195
 Naval Gun Hill, 144
 Naval guns, 156, 163; at Ladysmith, 50; Magersfontein, 70; Colenso, 91; shell Spion Kop, 154; near Folkrust, 216-17
 Neale, Tpr E. W., 84
 Neave, Lt A. C., 128
 Neild, Tpr W. J., 189
 Nelthorpe, 167
 Newcastle (Natal), 12, 27, 387
 Newcastle (NSW), 34
 Newlands, Tpr R. G., 316
 Newman, Lt W. A., 136, 205, 209
 New South Wales contingents; *see* Australian Units
 New Zealand contingents, 36, 178. *Artillery*, 195, 283, 311. *Bushmen*, 240, 282-3. *Mounted Rifles*, 101, 104, 118, 123, 187, 192, 358
 Nicholls, Tpr R. L., 149, 160-1
 Nicholson's Nek, 50
 Nile Field Force, 2, 3
Nineveh, troopship, 27
 Nixon, Nursing Sister E., 233
 Nooitgedacht (Magaliesberg Range), 304
 Nooitgedacht P.O.W. Camp, 220
 Norman, Tpr J., 160
 Norton, Cpl C. W., 259, 261
 Norval's Farm, 104
 Norval's Pont, 27, 36, 104, 173
 Nyalstroom, 317
- O'Brien, Tpr P., 307
 O'Connor, B. B., 182
 Oldham, Sgt, 364
 Old Viljoen's Drift, 191
 Olifants Nek, 252, 278
 Olifants River, 319-20
 Olivier, Comdt C. H., 206
 O'May, Tpr S. R., 319

Onderste Poort, 216, 343
 O'Neill's Farm, 215
 Onverwacht, 356-7
 Opperman, Comdt, 357
 Orange Free State, 140, 180; history, 10-11, 21-2, 24; joins Union of South Africa, 394
 Orange River Colony; *see* Orange Free State
 Orange River Station, 60
 Osborne, Lt S. F., 60, 120
Otago Witness, 315
 Ottoshoop, 250, 280, 282, 287-8, 294, 313
 Owens, Cpl F., 85
 Paardeberg Drift, 126, 141, 158, 167, 174, 205, 213, 364; Paardeberg Battle, 127-36
 Paardekraal, 14-15
 Paget, Maj.-Gen. A. H. F., 290-3, 351
 Pakeman, Lt J. E., 56
 Palazzi, Saddler-Sgt S. A., 186
 Palmer, Tpr E., 168
 Palmer, Lt Surgeon H. A., 331
 Palmer, Maj. H. G., 375
 Park, Col C. W., 55
 Parkinson, Tpr, 124
 Parrott, Cpl A., 198
 Parry, Tpr H., 333
 Parys, 191
 Paterson, A. B. (Banjo), 105, 123, 131, 134, 174, 183-4, 190-1, 195, 197-8, 210, 214, 287, 363
 Patterson, Capt. J. H., 332
 Peek, Trumpeter, R. de L., 235
 Peers, Tpr V. S., 109
 Penn Symons, Maj.-Gen. Sir William, 43-5
 Pepworth, W., 170
 Pepworth Hill, 50
 Perrott, Tpr H. A., 287
 Pestell, Tpr T., 68
 Peters, Tpr J. J., 332
 Phillip, Lt, 159
 Phillip, Tpr, 372
 Phillips, Capt. H., 157
 Phillips, Capt. L. M., 126-7
 Phillipstown, 305
 Philp, Hon. Sir Robert, 236
 Pickard, Comdt, 387
 Pickergill, Tpr, 162
 Picton, Lt H., 365-7, 369, 372-3
 Pienaar's Poort, 206-7
 Pienaar's River, 294, 317
 Pietermaritzburg, 49, 87, 90, 167
 Pietersburg, 293-4, 317, 319, 363-5, 368, 370-7, 376-7; Gen. Plumer enters, 318; Bushveldt Carbineers operate from, 362
 Pieters Hill, 167, 170
 Pieters Station, 51, 167, 170
 Pilcher, Col T. D., 81, 83-4, 194-5
 Pink Hill, 111-12, 114
 Pitts, Pte J., 54
 Pitsani, 19
 Plant, Tpr D., 178
 Pleasants, Bugler O. W., 114
 Plewman, 102
 Plumer, Brig.-Gen., 243, 294, 305, 317-18, 351; commands colonial column, 239; chases de Wet in Nth Cape Province, 306-7; secures Olifants R. drifts, 319-20; popular with Australians, 348-9; in east Transvaal, 356-7
 Plunkett, Tpr J., 54
 Pole-Carew, Lt-Gen. R., 219
 Ponsonby, Lt W. R., 97
 Poole, Tpr G. W., 81
 Poplar Grove Drift Battle, 137-8
 Porter, Tpr H., 349
 Porter, Col T. C., 122
 Potchefstroom, 21, 205
 Potchefstroom Road Drift, 194
 Potgieter, Comdt F. J., 387
 Potgieter's Drift, 144-6, 153, 162
 Potgietersrust, 318
 Power, Sgt J. C., 357
 Power, Lt T. H., 329
 Pretoria, history, 12-13, 15, 20-1, 25; President Kruger departs, 201; Lord Roberts enters, 202; Boer leaders meet Kitchener and Milner, 388; final

independence bid, 392; peace signed, 393
 Pretoria Convention, 15
 Pretorius, President M. W., 11
 Priddle, Tpr N., 102
 Prieska, 85-6, 307
 Prinsloo, Gen. M., 213-14
 Proclamation Hill, 202-3
 Putter's Kraal, 99

Queensland contingents; *see* Australian Units

Rabolini, Fireman, 90
 Rail, war correspondent, 284
 Railways, 16, 21, 31, 40, 49, 60, 101-2, 118, 173, 190, 195-6
 Ramah, 118
 Ram Dam, 118-19
 Ramsay, Tpr G. E. L., 28
 Rand; *see* Witwatersrand
 Rangeworthy Heights, 145-6, 149-50, 156
 Ransom, Cpl H. F., 82
 Rawling, Tpr J., 288
 Rawlinson, Col Sir Henry, 336-7, 387
 Rawson, Nursing Superintendent M., 233, 249
 Raymond, Sgt E. N., 258
 Read, Staff-Sgt H. T., 348
 Reade, Maj. C. J., 197
 Read's Drift, 307
 Reay, Maj. W. T., 108, 114
 Red Cross, Royal, 232-3
 Reddersburg, 175
 Reece, Tpr H. L., 179
 Reed, Tpr H., 187
 Reese, Lt C. G. B., 357
 Reform Committee, 20, 40-1, 47
 Refugee camps; *see* Concentration camps
 Refugees, 36-8, 51
 Reid, Hon. G. H., 33
 Reid, Lt H. A., 319-20
 Reitz, 327
 Reitz, Denyes, 345, 389
 Rensburg, 102-3, 108, 113

Retief, Piet, 10-11
 Reuter, Rev. F. L., 366
 Reuter's Mission Station, 365-6
 Reynolds, Mrs C., 313
 Reynolds, L.-Cpl M. H., 277
 Rhenosterfontein, 208-9
 Rhenosterkop Battle, 294-5
 Rhenoster River, 191
 Rhodenback, Tpr H., 316
 Rhodes, Cecil J., 85, 123, 136, 237; Jameson raid, 19-21
 Rich, Lt W. S., 215, 317
 Richards, Tpr A., 333
 Richardson, Tpr, 49
 Riddle, Tpr C., 349
 Ridley, Brig.-Gen. C. P., 270, 275, 277
 Rietfontein Farm, 49, 57
 Riet River, 64, 66, 73, 118, 120
 Rifles, 28, 32, 79
 Rimington, Col M. F., 60, 336-7
 Roads, in South African Republic, 16, 33, 137
 Roberts, Field Marshal Lord, 5, 15, 36, 39, 56, 94, 97, 107, 114, 117, 118-19, 126, 137, 141, 173-4, 182-3, 190, 191, 201-2, 203, 211, 265, 274, 294; C-in-C South Africa, 99; abandons supply wagons, 124-5; at Paardeberg, 131-3; enters Bloemfontein, 140; begins advance to Pretoria, 185; surrender of Johannesburg, 198; enters Pretoria, 205; Diamond Hill Battle, 207-9; lays down command, 299
 Roberts, Lt F., 94
 Roberts, Cpl V., 281
 Robertson, Capt., 364-5, 371
 Robertson, Capt. C. W., 255
 Robinson, Tpr A., 160
 Robinson, F., 147
 Robinson, Sir Hercules, 20
 Robson, Sqn Sgt-Maj. H., 63
 Rogers, Tpr J., V/C, 325
 Romilly, Lady, 230
 Rondavel Drift, 119
 Rondebosch, 110
 Roodeval, 387
 Roos Senekal, 301

Rorke's Drift, 14
 Rosebery, Lord, 99
 Rosettenville, 193
 Roth, Maj. R., 194
 Rowell, Lt F. N., 196-7
 Rowell, L.-Cpl T. H., 198
 RSL (Bathurst Sub-Branch), 376
 Rudd, Tpr F. W., 210
 Rule, Tpr J. H., 306
 Rumble, Tpr, 315
 Runck, Comdt, 197
 Russell, Pte A. W., 134
 Rustenburg, 206, 250-1, 264
 Ryrie, Cpl W., 240

Sale, Capt. A. A., 295, 318
 Salmon, Capt. R. W., 113
 Sand Drift, 307
 Sandeman, Maj. V. S., 345
 Sand River Convention, 11
 Sannah's Post, 176-7
 Satchwell, Saddler-Sgt A. E., 114, 183, 190
 Saxon Drift, 307
 Saxonwold Memorial, 160, 199
 Schiel, Colonel, 46-7, 372
 Schoeman's Drift, 278, 290
 Schroeder, Comdt, 319
 Schultze, Pte H., 61
 Scott, Pte R., V/C, 54
 Scott-Chisholme, Lt-Col J., 47
 Sea Cow River, 308
 Seccombe, Tpr N. T., 141
 Sellheim, Maj. V. C. M., 61-2, 66-8
 Seymour, Sgt J., 344-5
 Shappere, Nurse Rose, 50, 57, 294
 Sharp, Cpl, 372
 Shaw, Sgt G., 293
 Shea, Maj. J. S. M., 335
 Sheehan, Tpr W. T., 307
 Sheffield, Tpr, 160
 Shekleton, Col H. P., 315
 Shelley, Tpr, 160
 Shepstone, Sir Theophilus, 13
 Sherard, Tpr N., 202
 Sherlock, Capt. S., 331-2
 Short, Tpr A. J., 334

Simon's Bay, 23
 Simonstown, 46, 50
 Sinclair, Tpr D., 251
 Six Mile Spruit, 202
 Skene, Lt W., 304
 Skiet's Drift, 163
 Sladen, Maj. J. R. F., 327
 Slavery, in Cape Colony, 9; abolished, 10-11
 Sleath, R., 182
 Slingersfontein Farm, 103-4, 109, 113, 224
 Smit, K., 21
 Smith, Nurse E. M. B., 79
 Smith, Tpr F. V., 186-7
 Smith, J. A., 37
 Smith, Tpr R., 218
 Smith-Dorrien, Maj.-Gen. H. L., 270
 Smuts, Gen. J. C., 52, 254, 317, 335, 345-6; renounces British citizenship, 21; becomes Attorney, South African Republic, 22; organises Boers in west Transvaal, 257; destroys convoy at Buffelspoort, 304; attacks Lichtenburg, 311; invades Cape Colony, 343; attends assembly of delegates, 390; declares commandos exhausted, 393; at Versailles, 394
 South, A., 48
 South African Colonial Forces, *Bechuanaland Rifles*, 248. *Bethune's Mounted Infantry*, 27, 36, 153, 159. *Brabants Border Horse*, 175. *British South African Police*, 248. *Bushveldt Carbineers*, 318, 362, 363, 364, 368, 377-8, 379-80. *Cape Mounted Rifles*, 193. *Dundee Town Guard*, 45-6. *Dun-donald's Mounted Brigade*, 164, 167. *Durban Light Infantry*, 89, 90. *Imperial Light Horse*, 38-40, 42, 46-7, 52, 54-6, 88, 144, 159, 167, 199, 245, 307. *Imperial Light Infantry*, 88, 151, 159. *Kaffrarian Rifles*, 343. *Kimberley Light Horse*, 245, 264. *Kitchener's Horse*, 118, 128, 130, 276. *Natal Ambulance Corps*, 147. *Natal Carbineers*, 87-8, 96, 168, 201. *Natal Field Force*, 27, 49, 51, 88.

Natal Mounted Infantry, 38, 47, 54. *Natal Mounted Police*, 88. *Natal Naval Volunteers*, 166-7. *Natal Volunteer Medical Staff*, 57. *Natal Volunteers*, 49, 52, 54. *National Scouts*, 342, 387. *Nes-bitt's Horse*, 137. *Pietersberg Light Horse*, 368. *Protectorate Regiment*, 244. *Rhodesian Field Force*, 237, 240. *Rhodesian Volunteers*, 259. *Rimington's Scouts*, 69, 84-5, 118, 125, 126, 177. *Roberts' Horse*, 125, 177-8. *South African Constabulary*, 325, 363. *South African Light Horse*, 86, 88, 144, 147. *Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry*, 97, 147, 149.

South African News, 353
 South African Republic, 24-5, 33; history, 11-14; gold discovered at Watersrand, 16-17; problem of Uitlanders, 18; Jameson raid, 20; ultimatum to Britain, 23; Union of, 394
 South Australian contingents; *see* Australian Units
 Spearman's Farm, 163
 Spearman's Hill, 144, 148, 152
 Spelonken, 362, 364, 368, 370, 375
 Spencer Browne, Maj. R., 6
 Spion Kop, 96, 144-6; decision to attack, 148; the battle, 149-55; British decision to withdraw, 156; Boers return, 157; British losses, 158; Australians on Spion Kop, 160-1
 Spooner, H., 123, 134, 174
 Springfield, 144, 162
 Springfontein, 173
 Spurway, Tpr B., 179
 Stakes, Pte F., 67
Standard Digger News, 192
 Stanton, Tpr F. W., 272
 Stanton, Pte O. J., 134
 Steedman, Tpr A., 343
 Steele, Tpr J., 332-3
 Steenkamp, Anna, 10
 Stellenbosch, 60
 Steyn, Comdt, 130

Steyn, President M. J., 23, 138, 141, 189, 358-9, 388
 Stinkfontein Farm, 130
 Stirling, Capt., 291
 Stocker, Sgt A., 320
 Stormberg Junction, 99-100
 Strange, Tpr B., 178, 183
 Stratford, Tpr G. J., 68
 Strong, Lt W. J. W., 297
 Suakin, 2
 Sudan, The, 26, 109; NSW contingent in, 2-3
 Sullivan, Tpr T., 88, 93
 Sullivan, Sgt T., 304
 Sunnyside, 81-2, 84
 Surprise Hill, 52
 Sutherland, Tpr G., 271, 273
 Sutton, Tpr J., 212
 Sydney Light Horse; *see* N.S.W. Lancers
Sydney Morning Herald, 265, 287, 294, 344

Tabanyama, 146
 Table Bay, 23, 79
 Tactics, Boer, 29, 323, 343-6, 393-4
 Talana Hill Battle, 43-4, 49, 88
 Tami, 2
 Tasmanian contingents; *see* Australian Units
 Taungs, 344
 Taylor, Capt., 364, 371, 372
 Taylor, L.-Cpl J. W., 304
 Teck, Prince Alexander of, 124, 271
 Thaba 'Nchu, 176, 178, 185-6
 Theron, Comdt D., 276
 Thoba Mountain, 185
 Thomas, Tpr E., 107
 Thomas, Maj. J. F., 258, 282, 367, 371, 378, 380
 Thompson, Lt A. C., 316
 Thompson, Tpr H. P., 302
 Thompson, Capt. R. R., 220
 Thomson, Nursing Sister, A. E. H., 249
 Thorneycroft, Col A. W., 147, 149, 152-3, 155-61
 Three Tree Hill, 146, 149, 159

- Tiddy, Nursing Sister D., 249
Times (London), 273
 Tivey, Capt. E., 305
 Tobin, Cpl, 147
 Toll, Maj. F. W., 356-7
 Tracy, Maj., 251
 Trains, Hospital, 33
 Transport, 31-2
 Transvaal, 202, 394; history of, 10-16;
 pact with Orange Free State, 21; Aus-
 tralian refugees from, 88; Roberts
 enters, 191
 Transvaalers, The, 19, 192
Transvaal Leader, 56
 Transvaal National Union, 18-19
 Tratham, Cpl J. E., 270
 Tregonning, A., 206
 Trichard's Drift, 144, 146, 148, 153, 158,
 163
 Tucker, Lt-Gen. C., 124
 Tudhope, Cpl, 160
 Tugela Heights, 91, 162, 164
 Tugela River, 27, 49, 88, 91, 98, 144,
 158, 162, 164-5
 Tullibardine, Lt-Col Marquis of, 337
 Tully, Tpr H. E. M., 261, 263, 268
 Tunbridge, Maj. W. H., 259, 266-7,
 306, 354
 Turfontein, 193
 Tweebosch, 386
 Twin Peaks, 149, 153-4, 156
 Uitlanders, The, 24, 34, 36, 39-41, 147,
 149, 159-60, 199; history of, 17-19,
 21; petition Queen Victoria, 22;
 council, 33; at Elandslaagte, 36, 60,
 88
 Ulundi Battle, 40
 Umbulwana, Mount, 53
 Umphelby, Lt-Col C. E., 136, 139-40
 Vaal Krantz, 144, 162-3
 Vaal River, 11, 14, 191
 Valentine, Tpr H., 222
 Vallentin, Maj. J. M., 356-7
 Van Buren, 371
 Vanderberg's Drift, 128, 130
 Vandyke's Drift, 328
 Van Wyk's Drift, 193-4
 Veall, Tpr G. F., 112
 Vendutie Drift, 126, 128, 130
 Vereeniging, 23, 193, 389, 393-4
 Vet River, 187
 Vialls, Maj. H. G., 306, 308, 317, 357
 Victor, Prince, 374
 Victoria, Queen, 13, 22, 26, 33, 41, 64,
 80, 137, 393
 Victoria Barracks (Melbourne), 3
 Victoria Barracks (Sydney), 35
 Victorian contingents; *see* Australian
 Units
 Victorian Government, 339
 Viljoen, Gen. B. J., 285, 295-6, 304, 310,
 329-30
 Viljoen's Drift, 190-2
 Visser, Boer soldier, 366-7, 370
 Vivian, Lord, 345
 Volkrust, 205-6, 216-17
 Volks Hospital, 106, 109
 Volksraad, 13, 15, 22, 24, 189-90
 Vryheid, 334
 Victoria Cross: Tpr H. Albrecht, 56; Lt
 F. W. Bell, 324; Tpr J. H. Bisdee, 293;
 Lt Digby Jones, 56; Capt. N. Howse,
 276; Capt. R. Johnstone, 47; Lt.
 J. E. I. Masterson, 55; Lt L. C. May-
 gar, 333-4; Capt. C. H. Mullins, 47;
 Pte J. Pitts, 54; Tpr J. Rogers, 325; Pte
 R. Scott, 54; Lt G. G. E. Wylly, 293
 Wagon Hill, 53-7, 167
 Waine, Tpr A. H. C., 322
 Wakefield Military Prison, 333
 Walch, Lt J. C., 177
 Walker, Tpr A., 293
 Walker, Sgt H. F., 83
 Walker, Tpr J. E., 235, 268
 Wallace, L.-Cpl A. D., 280
 Wallace, Edgar, 349-50
 Wallack, Lt-Col E. T., 264, 300, 326
 Walter, Lt C. H., 318
 Walter, Nursing Sister E., 249
 Walthusien, General, 204
 Walton, Tpr S., 80

- Walyn, Dundee town guard, 45
 Wanliss, Lt E., 325
 Warburton, Tpr J. E., 326-7
 Warby, Tpr E., 245-6
 Ward, Tpr E. G., 138
 Wardrop, Lt A. T., 340, 341
 War Graves Commission, 6, 83
 Warm Bad, 293-4, 317-18
 Warren, Lt-Gen. Sir Charles, 143-6,
 148, 151-2, 154-9, 161, 210, 347
Warmambool, British ship, 36
 Wasson, S.-Sgt J., 210
 Waterval Bovan, 218, 224, 227
 Waterval Drift, 118, 119, 124, 178-9
 Waterval Onder, 215-16, 218, 221, 224
 Waterval Prison Camp, 220-2, 224-8
 Watson, Capt., 345
 Watson, Capt., 329, 332
 Watson, Maj. A., 5
 Watson, Rt Hon. J. C., 376-7
 Watson, Tpr W. J., 252
 Watson, Capt. W. W. R., 203-4, 205,
 289
 Watt, Capt. J. A., 336
 Wauchope, Maj.-Gen. A. J., 70
 Way, Tpr J., 199
 Webb, Maj., 230
 Webster, Tpr C. E., 29, 75-6
 Weekes, Cpl S., 86
 Wegdrai Drift, 124
 Weir, Tpr J., 352
 Weldon, Cpl P., 159
 Welkom Drift, 188
 Wepener, 175
 Wessells, Lt J., 291
 Western Australian contingents; *see*
 Australian Units
Western Advocate, 375
Western Mail, 300
 Westgarth, Lt J. E., 282
 Weston, Tpr J. A., 131
 Wherratt, L.-Cpl A. C., 258
 White, Lt-Col C. B. B., 4
 White, Tpr E. C., 351
 White, Gen. Sir George, 39, 49-50, 51,
 54, 55-6, 88, 98, 167
 White, Lt S., 327
 Whitney, Tpr A., 105
 Whittington, Tpr G. R., 224-7
 Wickerson, Tpr P. H., 79
 Wilge River, 214-15
 Wilhelm II, Emperor, 19, 21
 Wilkinson, F., 76-7, 78
 Wilkinson, Capt. J. F. M., 220
 Williams, Sgt F., 349
 Williams, L.-Cpl J., 323
 Williams, Col W. D. C., 181, 387
 Willoughby, Tpr S., 293
 Willow Grange, 90
 Willson, Tpr A. H., 111
 Wilmansrust, 6, 328-33
 Wilson, Tpr H. A., 349
 Wilson, RQMS J. W., 347
 Winburg, 186
 Winch, S.-Sgt W., 348
 Windmill Camp, 111
 Wise, Tpr W., 221
 Wiseman, Dvr W., 355
 Witton, Lt G. R., 361, 365, 367, 372,
 379-80; tried by Court-Martial,
 366-70; sentenced to life imprison-
 ment, 373; released 377; letter to
 Major Thomas 378
 Witwatersrand, 16-18, 392
 Wolmarans, Field Cornet, 336
 Wolsley, Lord, 2, 14, 181
 Wolvekuil Kopjes, 306
 Wood, Dr, 57
 Wood, Tpr W., 96
 Woodgate, Maj.-Gen. Sir Edward,
 148-51
 Woodman, Lt C., 341
 Woods, Tpr T. E., 250
 Wools-Sampson, Col Sir Aubrey, 20, 38,
 39, 40-1, 338
 Wright, Pte A., 90
 Wright, Farrier-Sgt G., 84
 Wyatt, Tpr H., 160
 Wylie, Fort, 93-6, 98, 164-5
 Wylie, Tpr, 316
 Wylly, Lt G. G. E., VC, 303
 Yates, Tpr, 365-6
 Young, Pte R., 194

INDEX

Yule, Col J. H., 44, 49
Yule, Dr P., 392

Zambesi River, 23
Zand River, 188-9

Zarp, 27, 104, 217, 266
Zeerust, 20, 250, 282, 284
Zouch, Lt R. E., 258, 260, 267, 282
Zulu Nation, 11, 12, 14, 37
Zulu War, 40, 48, 59, 82, 87, 348
Zwarts Kop, 162-3

Published jointly by
The Australian War Memorial
and the
Australian Government Publishing Service